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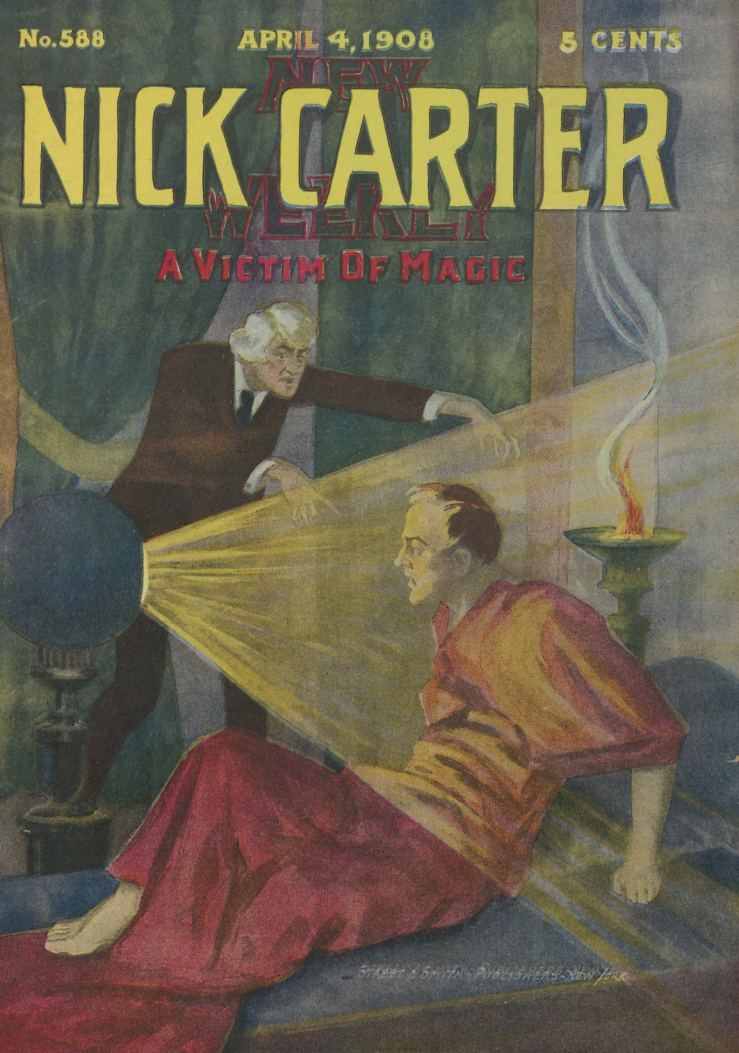
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A VICTIM OF MAGIC



NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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A VICTIM OF MAGIC;

OR,

Nick Carter's Struggle With a Human Tiger.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE ESCAPE OF SELIM, THE SYRIAN.

"Selim has made good his escape this time, all right, Nick. There is no fake about this one. You can see the way he went out as plainly as you can see the avenue if you take the trouble to look out of the window. Selim, the Syrian, is gone, and if I am any reader of character, he'll get busy right away, and there will be something doing in the Carter family."

It was Conroy Conner who delivered this somewhat remarkable speech.

It was the morning of the day following the arrival of Nick Carter, and his friend Conroy Conner of the United States Secret Service at the home of the former in New York, after a chase through three States after a dead man's secret, and the final recovery of the counterfeit plates that had been made by Vinton Potter with the aid and assistance of Anthony Prime, who was better known to the officers of the law under the name of Scar-face Horton.*

Prime and Potter had undertaken the biggest swindling scheme of the age, in that Potter, now dead and murdered by Prime, had engraved the plates from which had been made a great many bonds, certificates of stock and a lot of counterfeit money, all of which they had intended to float simultaneously in different parts of the world.

They had figured that they could make fifty million dollars out of the scheme, and that afterward both could retire and live not only outwardly respectable lives after that, but lives of ease and luxury.

But the skill and tenacity of Nick Carter had foiled all their efforts to accomplish their aim. Potter had been killed, Prime was in the Tombs, charged with several murders, and there was no chance of his escaping his just deserts, and the followers of the two men, in the efforts they made to possess themselves of the plates and bonds and money, had fought among themselves until the leader of them was dead, two others were so sorely wounded that it was not expected that they would live, and the third was also awaiting trial for murder.

The gang had been pretty thoroughly broken up.

Selim, the Syrian, had been a servant and confidential man for Anthony Prime, alias Scar-face. He was also in prison charged with murder, when it occurred to the two detectives that if he were set at liberty he might materially aid them in their recovery of the plates.

This idea was carried out in part.

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 587.

That is, Selim was given the idea that he had friends on the outside who would aid him to escape, and at a certain time he was freed as he was being taken from the Tombs to the headquarters of police; and the daily papers of the following morning had a lengthy account of the escape.

But the man was only taken to Nick Carter's house, where he was put into the strong room for safe keeping while the detective impersonated him and went among the Syrian's old pals to glean from them what information he could.

The plan worked out beautifully, and with the result that while Selim was left in the strong room under the care of Joseph, Nick and Conner chased after the plates and finally recovered them in the State of Vermont.

They arrived back in New York at three o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the recovery of the plates, and an hour later Nick went to the prisoner up-stairs and told the Syrian what had been done, finishing by assuring him that now that the plates were recovered and his—the Syrian's—part of it had been done, he would be returned to the prison forthwith, to await the time when he must stand trial for his crimes.

It is impossible to depict the rage of the man when he realized that he had been tricked.

He frothed at the mouth. He cursed in his own language and in English. He swore that he would work all sorts of reprisals upon the devoted head of the detective and the man who had assisted him, meaning Conner.

And finally he had worked himself into such an insensate rage that he actually leaped at the detective's throat there in the strong room and attempted to choke him.

Of course, it required very little exertion on the detective's part to throw the man off; but he sprang back to the attack a second time, so that Nick was obliged to strike him in order to save himself, with the result that Selim was down and out for the time being.

Because of this Nick had determined to keep the Syrian a few more hours in the house; he decided to keep him there until the following morning, before he took him back again to the Tombs, and he had also decided that he would have one more talk with the fellow.

So the two detectives had passed the evening together in the study, and now, in the early morning, when they had only just arisen, Conner had gone to the strong room to see that everything was all right with Selim.

The detective looked up from the morning paper that he was scanning and smiled, not for the instant comprehending what had been said to him.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Selim, the Syrian, has vamosed," replied Conner.

Nick stared at him in surprise.

"You don't mean that he has escaped—really?" he asked.

"I certainly do. I mean just that."

"From the strong room?"

"Yes, from the strong room; and he has left a hole big enough to drive a team of horses through it. Of course, that is figurative, but it isn't so far wrong for all that."

"Let's go up and have a look at the place," said the detective; and he led the way to the top floor of the house, where the strong room was located.

It was not necessary that they should look very far to discover how the man had made good his escape, for it was apparent at once.

A large, round hole had been sawed in the panel of the solid oak door, and it was cut as cleanly as if the man had been provided with the very best of tools.

But the hole was there, the pieces that had been sawed out of the door were scattered about the room and the hallway outside, and the man was gone.

Located in the center of the house, there was no window to the room. There was a skylight for ventilation, and this was protected by heavy iron bars. The sides of the room were padded and upholstered in leather; there was a bed, a couch, two comfortable chairs, and all the necessaries for remaining there an indefinite time. The door, which was also padded, was made of heavy oak, and was thought to be capable of withstanding almost any attack that might be made upon it.

Just now the room looked as if a cyclone had struck it.

The leather upholstering had been cut and slashed in many places in wanton desire to destroy. At the door it was entirely cut away, and there was the large hole through it, already described.

That was practically all.

There was no way of determining how Selim had possessed himself of the tools necessary to make his way to liberty. It was impossible to guess how he could have found an augur or a bit with which to begin the hole he had cut in the door, or how he had found a saw with which to complete it after it was begun.

But there was the hole and there was the vacant room; there was the fact that Selim was absent—and there was one more thing, too: it was a short note, written in Syrian, which Selim knew that Nick could understand. It said:

"You thought to hold me, but you cannot. I am smarter than you, for I look into the future. I see trouble for you ahead. Selim will have his revenge, even if it takes years to accomplish it. Selim is enraged. Beware of Selim."

That was all, but it was significant.

"How did he do it, Conner?" asked Nick presently, gazing at the hole in the door.

"He did it with his little hatchet—I should say his little saw," replied the Irishman, with a grin. "At least it has that look to me."

"But where did he get the little saw, Con?"

"Faith, you can search me till you're black in the face and I'll not tell you."

"He was searched thoroughly before he was put into this room, and he had nothing of the kind on him."

"It might have been sewed into his clothes, somewhere, Nick."

"No; I am positive that it was not."

"Then it was handed to him somehow."

"That is equally impossible. I wonder——"

"What are you wondering about, Nick?"

"When Selim was brought up there to this room he had a considerable number of silver rings on his fingers that he had been permitted to retain in the Tombs. They looked innocent enough, and it did not occur to me to take them away from him. I begin to think now that those rings have had something to do with this escape."

"I don't know how you can make that out."

"Why, merely that the rings were nothing but tiny tools so dexterously made as to defy detection. I heard once of such a set of tools, so expertly made and so wonderfully strong for their size that they not only could be worn on the fingers and also in the shape of other ornaments, but were competent to cut their way through almost any obstacle. I did not take much stock in the story when I heard it; I begin to do so, now."

"Anyhow, Selim is *non est*—eh?"

"So it seems."

Neither of the detectives had been down-stairs as yet, but now they made their way to the breakfast-room, where they breakfasted alone, for Chick and Patsy and Patsy's wife were still absent.

"Did you hear any noise in the night, Joseph?" the detective asked of his servant.

"No, sir."

"Our prisoner has escaped," continued the detective mildly, exactly as if he were announcing a most trivial occurrence.

Joseph stared.

"Escaped, sir?" he said. "I—did I understand you, sir?"

"Perfectly."

"But from the strong room, sir?"

"Yes, Joseph. He left a letter in which he said he was smarter than we are, and I begin to think he was correct in that. Anyhow he has gone, and he is a dangerous man to have at large just now. He can strike death all around him, and do it in utter silence, and without the least suspicion attaching to him. The Syrian is a dangerous serpent to have crawling around, and, Conner, I expect that it is up to us to get him back again as soon as possible."

"It looks that way, Nick. We owe it to the district attorney. We promised him that Selim should be returned to him when he had served his purposes with us; and now—where is he?"

The detective shook his head, at a loss for a reply.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SYRIANS.

It is the reader's due that we should return to Selim for a short space to explain how he accomplished the difficult feat he performed, for it all became known to the detective later, and is interesting, although not necessarily a part of this story.

When the detective and Conner returned home after their trip to Vermont, and told Selim of the recovery of the plates, informing him at the same time that he had served his part in the matter and would now be returned to the tender mercies of the law, the rage of the Syrian was something awful.

From his own standpoint, he felt that he was imposed upon and deceived, although he had not been at all; he had only deceived himself.

But the result was the same to him.

He believed that he had been badly used.

At first he was perfectly content to await the action of the detective, because he supposed that he would ultimately be set free; but when his mind was disabused of that idea, he became transformed into a very incarnate devil, and at once set his powers to work to escape before he could be conveyed back again to the Tombs.

We have already stated that Nick was obliged to knock the fellow down before he was able to get away from him, and that blow only added to the awful rage that Selim felt.

There were four huge silver rings on his fingers, and these he now removed and laid them on the couch beside him. Then one by one he raised them and pressed a spring in each, so that they flew open and straightened out, showing that each was hollow, and that the tiny receptacles contained other things.

These presently resolved themselves into the very kit of tiny tools that Nick afterward mentioned to Conner; and with these he set to work as soon as the house was silent.

The first hole that was bored through the oaken door was not larger than a knitting-needle, but it was bored quickly, and others followed it in quick succession until at last a bit of wood the size of a lead pencil fell outside into the hall.

This hole was the place for him to begin to saw, and

now another tool not larger than the first one came into requisition.

Although tiny in size it was a giant in accomplishment. It cut its way through the hard and seasoned wood as if it were cheese, and within an hour from the time Selim began operations, he had sawed the round hole in the door which was plenty large enough for him to force his body through it.

He stopped then long enough to write the note that has already been repeated, and then, moving along as silently as a shadow, he made his way down the stairs and out of the house, carefully closing each door behind him, and making in all that time not the slightest sound.

Once safely on the street outside he turned and shook his fist at the house, and he swore an oath in Syrian which need not be repeated here; it is enough to say that it was a terrible oath, and that by it he swore by the reputations of all his ancestors, and by every hope he had for the future that he would devote his life to revenge before he attempted another thing.

After that he glided away and was lost in the darkness.

But he sought at once the Syrian quarter of the city, and late as it was he went to a certain address, where he rapped with a signal that was at once answered.

It was one of his own countrymen who came to the door, and a stranger, looking on, would have discovered at once that the two men were unknown to each other.

In fact, they had never seen each other before in their lives, but they both belonged to the same secret order which had its headquarters in their own country, and branches all over the world.

After satisfactory questions and answers had been asked and replied to, Selim was allowed to enter the house, and he was conducted through a narrow hall and finally into a large room at the rear of the building where three other men besides himself and the man who admitted him were seated.

They raised their eyes questioningly when Selim entered the room, but perceiving that it was a man who was not known personally to them, they all sat up straight and looked upon him with frowning brows and slumbrous eyes that glowed fiercely through the half-light of the room.

Selim strode directly to the center of the room and stopped. Then he looked calmly around him, and after a silence which under the circumstances seemed interminable, he said, in his own tongue:

"My brothers, I come among you, not as a suppliant, but as your chief. I am Kerak al Dimeshk, Selim of Damascus, and I have inscribed over my heart the right to exercise authority over you—as you shall see."

He loosened his clothing and bared his breast, and presently the others in the room, as they gazed upon the sign they saw there, came forward and prostrated themselves before him.

"We are your servants," they said as with one voice. "What does our brother wish with us this night?"

"That you shall know in good time; but first we will go through with the ritual of our order, so that there may be no mistake. I will begin; do you follow me, one after another."

Then followed certain utterances in their own language to which one by one they replied. The whole thing was in the form of a monotonous recitation which passed from one to another round and round that circle of five, for when one finished another began, and they so continued until all the secret work was accomplished.

"It is well," said Selim, when it was finished. "Now that you know me, and are prepared to obey me, I will tell you what it is that I expect you to do. But first, how many are now in this city who are of our order?"

"Alas," replied the man who had admitted Selim to the house, and whose name was Kalat el Hosn, "there are now no others but ourselves. We are all."

"But there was a time not so long ago, when there were fifty of you," insisted Selim.

"Aye. It is so. But that time has passed. These brothers whom you see here are all that is left of our brotherhood in this far-away country from our kin; but now that you have arrived among us, oh, master and friend, we will take new heart. We are five, now that you are here; and after a little more time there may be more. In what way can you make use of us, my master?"

"I have an enemy, Kalat," was the direct reply.

"He is dead," was the rejoinder.

"Ay, since you say so. But he is a hard man to kill. He is a detective. His name is Nicholas Carter, in English. Do you know the man? Have you heard of him?"

The four men shook their heads, and Kalat replied:

"He is not known to us, but since he is your enemy, he shall die."

"A few days ago," began Selim, "I was a prisoner in the city jail. I had been taken to it because a man chose to drop dead directly in front of me in the street, and it was thought that I killed him. I was just about to find a way of communicating with you here, when a strange circumstance liberated me, and at first I supposed it was my brother and his followers here who performed it.

"But I was undeceived. It was the work of that detective. He had thought to make a tool of me, and last evening he returned after an absence, and informed me that I was to be taken back to the prison again, there to suffer the full penalty of the law for the crime they said I had committed; and the full penalty of the law in this country means death by electricity."

All the men who listened shuddered.

They could understand death by the knife; death by

the bullet; death by poison—but death by electricity seemed to them the acme of horror.

"I escaped," continued Selim. "I came here. There is no place in the city where I will be safe, only here. The hounds of the law will be on my track early in the morning. They may be pursuing me even now. There will be no rest for me. That detective whom I have named will follow me all over the world to capture me again. His arm is long and strong."

"He must die," said Kalat.

"Yes. He must die; but also I must find a way to hide from his eyes, and to walk about the street at the same time, for I would face him. I would go where he goes."

"You shall."

"To do that, I will have to be changed so that even if I stand face to face with him, he will not know me; so that even if I talk to him he will not hear my voice; so that even if I proclaim to him aloud that I am Selim, he will not believe."

"It shall be done."

"In the morning, when daylight comes, every police officer in the city will be looking and searching for me. Every city in the country will be notified that I am at large and will be asked to capture me if it can be done. Every country in the world will be told that Selim is a fugitive from justice and should be treated like a dog when found."

A general groan followed this announcement.

"I will be a hunted creature with no place to lay my head.

"You have this place, and our strong arms to protect you while you sleep."

"I know. But out of doors I would not be safe."

"Safe? You shall be changed. I am the expert. It is I who will change you."

"Then, Kalat, begin at once."

"Before you rest?"

"Yes. I have no need of rest. After I am changed so that none may recognize me, then perhaps I will rest; then we will arrange for what is to be done."

"What change will you invite? Is it that you would be young and handsome, or that you would appear to be old and beyond the power to defend yourself while at the same time you retain all your youthful vigor?"

"There is no power to change back again, Kalat?"

"No; once the change is wrought, you must remain so to the end of your days. There is only one change possible in life. You should know that."

"I have been told it, but I am not an expert; I did not know."

"It is true. By the magic I use I can change you so that nothing remains to tell who you were, save that tattoo mark on your breast. But even that would not betray you, so great will the change become; it would only be thought that there were two marks alike in the world."

"It is well. Make me, then, to be one who is of middle age, but whose hair is yet snow white because of the hours he has spent at prayer; make me with a handsome face and glowing eyes, so that I may attract all who come in contact with me. Give to me the gift of speech, the power of memory, the strength of the lion, the subtlety of the fox, the cruelty toward my enemies of the tiger, the shrewdness of the serpent, the voice of one who charms; give me all these, Kalat, and I will be satisfied; but take not from me the memory of my wrongs, or of my hate."

"It shall be done, Kerak; and hereafter you shall even be known by another name. Shall it be done now?"

"Yes. At once."

"Then our brothers must go and leave us alone together. Later, I will call to them and all shall witness the changes that I have wrought."

The others rose from their places and moved silently toward the door; then they passed outside, closing it behind them, and Selim and Kalat were alone together.

CHAPTER III.

THE WONDERS OF SYRIAN MAGIC.

As soon as the two were alone together, Kalat drew forward a wide couch, which he placed in the center of the room, so he could pass around it freely.

Next he rendered the already dim light in the room still more obscure, and then from a secret recess he brought forward an object that was covered with a cloth, and this he placed at one end of the couch.

Next, a small brazier was placed at the opposite end of the couch, and into an urn which Kalat put upon it he dropped a handful of yellow powder, to which he touched a match, so that in a moment more the room was filled with a heavy smoke, which yet did not interfere with their powers of breathing.

Then Kalat commanded Selim to disrobe until he was as naked as he was born, and then he wrapped a crimson sheet around him and told him to lie at full length upon the couch.

That done, he passed to the opposite end of the couch and removed the covering from the globelike object he had placed there, and with a touch he started a light burning inside the globe, causing it to give forth a strange and ghostly glow that had in it a suggestion of the color of blue.

He raised Selim's head so that he could gaze directly at the globe, by putting a pillow beneath it, and then, stepping back to the end of the couch where he was out of sight, he said to the patient:

"Gaze steadily at the light that burns within the globe. Forget all things save that the light is there, and that you would like to read what it has to say to you."

A moment later he began to chant in a low, monotonous tone, and he kept that up for a long time without changing the swing of it at all, until he saw that Selim had become as rigid as a cataleptic, that his eyes were wide and staring, and that there was no indication of breathing about him.

He stepped to the side of the couch and attempted to raise one of Selim's arms, but it was as if the whole body were made of marble. Every muscle was as rigid as if made of steel.

Kalat smiled as if he were greatly pleased at the result of his efforts, and presently he opened a door at one end of the room and drew the couch with its burden through it, and closed the door behind him.

He was gone a considerable time; but at last he returned, and, having removed the other evidences of his ceremonies, and turned up the light in the room, he opened a window a moment to permit the fumes of that strange smoke to escape.

And then he went to the door through which the other men had taken their departure, and, having uttered a peculiar cry, returned to his chair and waited until they came to him.

The three came in eagerly, evidently expecting to discover their new friend there, already so altered and changed that they would not recognize him; but he was not there; there was no one there but Kalat himself.

"Where is Selim?" one of them asked as they resumed their seats and took up their pipes.

"He has gone," replied Kalat, smoking steadily.

"Where has he gone?"

"On a journey."

"But we thought that you were to change him by your magic, Kalat."

"He has gone to make the change now. Did you suppose that it could be done in a moment? Was the world created in a moment?"

"No. When will he return?"

"It will be long, as you count time, my brothers. The time will be but as a moment or an instant to Selim; and I caution you, when he awakes, you are not to tell him that time has flown. You are to say that it was but now that he dropped into the sleep."

"He is sleeping, then?"

"Yes."

"How long will he sleep?"

Kalat looked at the questioner with a strange smile.

"Did you not hear him request that he be made into one of middle age, whose hair was of the whiteness of snow, whose face was handsome, whose eyes glowed, who had the gift of speech, the power of memory, the strength of lions, the subtlety of foxes, the cruelty of tigers, the shrewdness of serpents, the voice and graces of charmers?"

"Yes. We heard."

"All those attributes take time, my brother. Into the soul of Selim I have to infuse other souls. He is now on a journey to find the handsome face and the snow white hair that he craved. When he returns, having found them and secured them for his uses, he will depart again for the glowing eyes and the gift of speech; after that he must go on another journey to secure the power of memory. Have you forgotten that he wanted the strength of the lion? He must journey after that, to find the soul of a lion that I may infuse it into him; then the soul of a fox and of a tiger, and the wisdom of a serpent; and when all that is done, he must take yet one more journey to find the voice and the graces he craves. It will consume much time to obtain all these."

"But how much? How long will he be gone?"

Kalat began to count his fingers.

"The bravest lions are from Nubia," he said presently. "It is a long way to Nubia; the fiercest tigers are from Bengal; that, too, is a long way. You see?"

"But it does not tell us when we may see the changes that your arts have wrought."

"Ah! It will be long; long! But I will tell you when it is ready."

"You will send for us?"

"Yes."

"Will it be before the dawn, Kalat?"

"No; nor yet another. There will be many dawns before you will see what you wish. I know not how long. Those are far journeys that he must take."

"What witchery is it? How do you perform the miracle?"

"I perform it? Not I. It is done in the other world, beyond the veil which separates us from it."

"Tell us then how he will look when he returns to us, Kalat?"

"He will be tall and handsome and straight as a young tree. His face will be youthful, although his hair will be white. He will have the gift of many tongues, and the graces of the lords of creation. His smile will fascinate, his voice will be music."

"How else will he be?"

"As a giant in strength, as a tiger in cruelty. He will be a demon in his thoughts of those who have offended him. He will have no compassion, no pity, no consideration for others. He will be even as a human devil suddenly let loose upon the world to wreak vengeance upon it for the wrongs it has done to him."

"And may he not be also cruel to you, who will have made him all these things?"

"To me—no. To you and to others—perhaps. If you offend him—yes."

"You fill me with fright, Kalat."

"It will be worse when you know him."

"He will be so changed that none will know him?"

"None will know him."

"Will he even be himself at all?"

"He will remain himself only in memory. Nothing but that will be left to him of what he was when he came here to-night."

"And will he live on just the same, Kalat?"

"Ah, that is the terrible thing of this change, for he cannot die save by violence, after these changes have once taken place. No sickness can touch him. Only violence can overcome one who passes through the ordeal that is being visited upon Selim now."

"Do you mean to tell us that if he is not killed, he will live on forever, until the end of time?"

"Even as that myth, the Wandering Jew, is supposed to live on. But this is no myth. It is true. He cannot die, save by violence."

"Kalat, I would live on and on and on, if I could. Will you work the change upon me?"

"No."

"And why not, since you did not hesitate to perform the service for him?"

"He demanded it. He is my superior. Besides he was a hunted man who would have been given into the hands of the law and murdered. It was my duty."

"How do you get this power?"

"I may not tell you that. It is given to me."

"And do you perform the miracle often?"

"But twice before in all my career have I done it; but twice since——"

"Since when, Kalat?"

"Since it was done for me."

"And you—*you?* Have you passed through the change yourself?"

"Yes. Thus only is the power conferred to bestow it upon another."

"Then Selim will have that power when he awakes?"

"Yes; and I tremble to think what use he may make of it."

"Why so?"

"Because he does not have to wait until the request is made, in order to bring that great change to another. If he hated you, he could capture you somewhere and bring you here, and if he could get you under his control, he could change you as he willed without your permission. Thus he will doubtless change his enemies."

"I will ask him to change me. I would be young and handsome again, and live on, forever."

"Aye, but Selim will be cruel. For the very love of cruelty he would not change you into what you wished to be, but into an old and ugly man, and you would hate yourself. No; leave it alone. Magic is not good for those who do not require it."

"I will fear him, Kalat."

"You will have reason to fear him. I am beyond his harm, but you will not be."

"He will change his enemies, then?"

"Perhaps. I cannot say. I am not he."

"Tell me when the change was wrought in you, and why were you not made into a different being, since you had your choice?"

"Alas, I had no choice. It was a vengeance upon me. I have been what you see now for more than a hundred years, and nobody knows how many more centuries I shall remain so, unless——"

"Unless what, Kalat?"

"Unless I use violence against myself."

"Tell me when Selim will awaken. I would be here."

"Then come to me one month from to-night—thirty days."

"So long as that?"

"Yes."

"His enemies may be dead by that time."

"So much the better."

"But how will you protect him in the meantime, if others should come here searching for him?"

"There is a way. I will exercise it."

"Will you tell me how?"

"No."

"Is the change taking place now? If his enemies should see him before that month expires would they recognize him?"

"Hosmek, you wish to know too much. Cease. I have told you more now than I intended."

"But some day, Kalat, you will make the change for me?"

"Perhaps. I will see. I will see."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEAD MAN IN THE FRONT ROOM.

The day following upon the escape of Selim from the house of the detective, Nick and Conner exhausted every expedient they could think of to get some trace of him.

It was not alone that he was a dangerous character to have at large; not alone that he was guilty of many crimes for which he should be punished; it was greatly because of the obligation they were under to the district attorney, through whose favor Nick had been able to take Selim from the prison and convey him to his own house.

He had given his word that Selim should be carefully guarded and would be returned to the Tombs in time for his trial.

But now Selim had dexterously given them the slip at the very moment when the detective was about to

take him back to the embrace of the law; and there was no sign of him to be discovered anywhere.

They even searched the Syrian quarter of the city quite carefully, but they well knew, even after they had finished, that a Syrian might have been hidden away from them there with but little chance of their being able to find him.

This search they kept up day after day, Conner delaying his return to Washington on that account; but each evening saw them retire with the same result—that is, with no result at all.

A week passed in this manner, and not a sign of Selim had been discovered; not a suggestion that he was among the living had been found.

Nick, in the meantime, had visited the district attorney and told him the whole circumstance, saying in conclusion that he would devote his entire time to finding Selim, and not think of taking another case until it was accomplished.

"It is the first time that any one has ever succeeded in escaping from the strong room in my house," he said. "My own sense of pride is at stake in this matter."

"All right," replied the official. "Do your best, Nick. You will get him sooner or later; I have no fear about that; and in the meantime I will wait."

And so the search went on without result until near the end of the second week, when, after a tireless day, the two detectives were seated together in Nick's library, discussing the case.

"It is my private opinion, Nick, that Selim has gone back to his own country," said Conner. "The pace got too hot for him here, and he thought he would be safer somewhere else. He has lit out," said Conner, puffing vigorously at his cigar.

"I don't think so," replied the detective. "I believe he is still in the city and is merely lying low, waiting."

"No, Nick, I don't agree with you. He has lit out. His talk about revenge was a bluff. Take my word for it."

"I should sooner think that he is in hiding somewhere in the Syrian quarter of the city, Conner."

"We have been through it twice."

"We have been through it in a casual way twice—yes; but we have not searched it thoroughly."

"I don't know what you mean by thoroughly, then."

"I'll show you in the morning, for that is what I intend to do next; search the Syrian quarter thoroughly."

"Don't you suppose, if he is there, that he can run from one house to another, like a rat, and avoid us in that way?"

"That is precisely what I believe he has done in the past, and what I propose to avoid his doing this time."

"Well, I'm with you. I want to find him as badly as you do, so if there is anything you can think of that is going to help us out, you have only got to suggest it."

It was quite early the following morning when they began what they intended to be a very thorough search of the Syrian quarter.

They began at the upper end of it and worked down, and they had five men to assist them; five men from the central office.

It was the duty of these men to act merely as guards while Nick and Conner searched the houses, and the theory was to have two guards at the front of the house, two at the rear, and one on the roof; and then to move slowly along from house to house, thus obviating the possibility that the hunted man might run from place to place during the search.

We will not give in detail the particulars of that search; it is sufficient to say that presently they came to the house of Kalat el Hosn, and entered it.

Kalat, who appeared to be a man of middle age, met them at the door, for he had been apprised of what was taking place; and he bowed respectfully when Nick approached him.

"Your servant, sirs," he said to Nick, in good English. "You come, I suppose, on the same errand that brought you here before?"

"Yes."

"And the last time, when I explained to you that my friend was sick, you did not disturb him. How is it to be this time?"

"I am afraid that we will have to be more thorough this time," said Nick. "We contented ourselves before by merely looking into the room where the sick man was, but this time I am of the opinion that we will have to look closer."

"Even where the hand of death has rested?"

"What's that?"

"My friend who was sick is now dead."

"Indeed. That's too bad."

"He is in the same room where he was sick so long a time. Will you insist upon entering there?"

"Yes. There is no help for it."

"Then follow me and I will lead you there first."

We who have already looked upon the interior of that building can guess that the room into which Kalat conducted them was the same that he had dragged the unconscious Selim into the night of the magic ceremony.

It was merely an ordinary room, such as one might expect to find in a house in that quarter of the city; a room twelve by fourteen feet in extent, with the floor covered by a rug, with curious furniture along the sides of it; with strange pictures and ornaments upon the walls, and with a platform made by laying boards across two wooden horses in the middle of it.

Upon the platform was stretched a figure with a sheet drawn over it; and outwardly, of a certainty, the figure bore every semblance of death.

Nevertheless Nick, who had determined to be thorough

this time, stepped quickly forward and drew down the sheet; then he stepped back with a little exclamation of astonishment.

"Come here, Conner," he called to his friend who had passed on into the adjoining room—the room where Selim first encountered his four new friends. "Look at that," he added, when the secret service officer joined him. "Did you ever see a more remarkable face than that?"

Conner gazed for some time in silence; then he shook his head.

"No," he said. "I don't think I ever did. I never saw such white hair above a face so young and handsome, or a dead man who in death looked such a picture of health."

"Don't you think, Con, that the face has something of the look of Selim about it?"

"Why, yes. So has the old chap who lives here. He has something of the look of Selim. The Syrians are like Chinamen; they all look alike to me."

"I wonder," the detective murmured, half to himself, "if this man is really dead, or if this is not some of the sorcery I have heard that certain tribes of these fellows practise."

"What is that you are saying about sorcery, Nick?"

"Syrians are full of it, Con. Some of them can give the Hindus cards and spades at it, too. I was wondering in my own mind if this is not a part of some of their practises?"

"Do you mean that the fellow may not be dead?"

"Yes."

Conner reached out and touched one of the hands; he even attempted to lift it, only to discover that the joints were perfectly stiff, and that the hand was as cold as a dead man's hand should be.

"He is dead, all right," he told Nick.

"I doubt it, just the same," was the reply. "Stay here a moment and study this face while I talk with the old fellow who let us in."

"All right. Go ahead."

Nick passed into the adjoining room where Kalat had seated himself and was gently rocking.

"What is your name?" asked the detective abruptly.

"Kalat el Hosn," was the reply.

"Where are you from?"

"From that place in Syria whose name I bear."

"How long have you been in this country?"

"Many years."

"Have you known a man named Selim?"

"I have known many so named."

"What was the name of the man whom you say is dead, in that other room?"

"He was called Kerak el Dimeshk."

"How long has he been dead?"

"Since the day before yesterday."

"What was his illness?"

"It was a malady which I cannot describe to you."

"Indeed! Do you think you could describe it to the health department? That is about what you will have to do. Did you have a physician?"

"Yes. One of our own people who is a doctor."

"How long was the man ill?"

"Two weeks nearly."

"He was lying as he is now both the other times that we were here searching, only that he was on a cot instead of upon that wooden platform. I did not examine him closely, but I have no doubt now that he was as stiff and dead then as he is now. You have been practising a spell of Syrian magic upon him, Kalat."

"No; it is not true."

"And the man is not dead."

"He is dead."

"Well, I am going to have him taken away from here and examined by competent physicians. I will find out if he is dead or not, and if he is, there shall be a post-mortem examination to discover what was the matter with him. I do not like the way you look at me, old man, or your manner of speaking. You are altogether too smooth. You know perfectly well who I am looking for, and if you were so minded I think you could tell us where he is. Conner!"

"Yes."

"I am going to find a telephone. Will you stay there and guard that dead man till I return?"

"Sure."

"I will be gone only a few moments."

"All right, old chap."

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY ABOUT CONNER.

Nick had to go farther than he anticipated to find a telephone, and when he did discover one he was some time in obtaining the connection he wanted.

Then it took time to make the department understand just what it was that he wanted, and so it was almost half an hour before he returned again to the house where he had left Conner.

The two watchmen or guards he had taken there with him were still at the front of the house, and he had no doubt that the others were at the rear; but as he entered the place he felt a sense of foreboding come over him which he could not define.

When he entered the room where the supposed dead man was lying, Conner was nowhere to be seen; neither was Kalat.

The dead man was apparently stretched under the sheet as he had been when they first discovered him, but

yet, as Nick glanced toward him, the corpse seemed to be longer than it was before.

"Conner!" Nick called aloud. "Conner!"

There was no reply, and Nick called again, but still with the same result.

He passed into the rear room and again called, when he perceived that neither Conner nor the old man who lived in the house were there.

"Conner, where are you?" he called; but no reply came to him, and Nick began to realize that something had happened to his friend.

He hurried back again into the other room, and, with a sudden jerk, pulled the sheet away from the face of the man on the bier.

The first glance startled him more than he would have believed it possible, and in spite of his perfect self-control he uttered a loud exclamation of amazement mixed with consternation.

The dead man who had occupied the place on the bier had disappeared, and now, lying there in his place and stead, was Conner.

And Conner looked quite as dead as the other man had appeared to be. He was white; his features were set and hard, and when Nick touched him he found that the flesh was as cold and hard as if he had been dead many hours.

Not only that, but as the detective attempted to lift one of Conner's arms, he discovered to his added amazement that a perfect state of catalepsy had intervened, and that Conner's body was as rigid as it would be if *rigor mortis* had really become complete.

But Nick knew, even if Conner were dead, which he could not believe—which he did not think of believing—that there had not been sufficient time for any such condition to come about.

For a moment Nick did not know what to do.

He bent forward and listened to hear the beating of Conner's heart, but that bosom was as silent as if it were in reality dead, and Nick began now to fear that it might be so.

He ran to the door and called the two guards from the front of the house, and to one of them he said:

"Run and find me the nearest doctor and bring him here; only be sure that he is not one of these Orientals;" and bidding the other man follow him, he led the way back into the room.

There he pointed silently at Conner, and after the man had stared in speechless surprise for a moment, he said:

"This is what happened since I went out to find a telephone. Can you suggest an explanation?"

"No, sir; no, I cannot."

"Did any one pass you to go upon the street?"

"Not a soul."

"Or to enter the house?"

"No; you know I would not have permitted that."

"Did you hear any noise from inside the house?"

"None at all."

"Go and see if the two men are stationed at the rear where they should be."

The man went away, but he returned after a moment, on the run, and with his face as white as the sheet that half-covered Conner.

"They are there," he cried out, "but they are in the same condition that Mr. Conner is in—that is, not exactly in the same condition, for they are limp; but they are both asleep and I cannot awaken them."

"Can you lift them?" asked the detective, who began to understand that he had run upon a mystery which was perhaps a part with the one he was trying to unravel. "Can you lift them, one at a time?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then bring them in here. There is a couch in the back room and one in this. Bring them in one by one, where I can examine them. I don't wish to leave Conner unguarded another moment."

As soon as the detective saw the two men who were brought in, he understood at once that it was a case of hypnotism, and, having fixed them as comfortably as possible, knowing that they should be left to awaken in their own good time, he turned his attention again to his friend.

This was hypnotism, doubtless, with catalepsy thrown in, a hypnotism that might result in actual death unless the man were somehow saved: but Nick felt that the case was beyond him, and that he could do nothing until the arrival of a doctor.

Fortunately, the guard returned with one he had found, just at that moment, and Nick, in as few words as possible, related all that had happened in that house.

The doctor was a young man and evidently a Jew, but he was smart and bright, and he knew his business thoroughly.

"I have been more or less among these people for two years, sir," he said, while he bent over Conner, "and I have already seen enough of them to know that they are great mystics. I know that they are adepts at certain practises, which I cannot describe by any other word than occult, for the reason that I know no other word which will convey to you the impression I wish to give."

"I understand you," replied the detective.

"I don't wish it to be understood that I believe in occultism, for I am not prepared to go as far as that: but I do know that some of these people, and particularly the man who lives in this house, indulge in most mysterious practises that I am at a loss to explain."

"Let us get right down to this present case," said Nick. "I will discuss the other part of it with you later."

"Very well, sir; although there is very little that we can do in this present case."

"What do you mean by saying that there is very little that we can do? Isn't there something that can be done for my friend?"

"There are things that might be done, but with more probability of injury to the patient than though we left him entirely alone. If I were to advise——"

"That is what I expected of you when I sent for you."

"Then I would suggest that you let me take him to my house, which is not far away, and I will then stand watch over him and wait. If I think it best to apply restoratives at any time, I will do so; but my own idea would be to watch and wait."

"For how long a time?"

"Twelve hours, at least. If the catalepsy does not begin to disappear by that time, we will resort to heroic measures. My own opinion is that he will come out of it naturally, in a few hours."

"What about these other men?"

"They are merely in a hypnotic sleep. We will let them rest where they are until——"

"I'll call up a patrol-wagon and take them to headquarters," said one of the guards.

"That will do very nicely," said the doctor. "Now, Mr. Carter, shall I have your friend removed to my house, as I suggested?"

"Yes. But wait a moment. I had already sent to the Department of Health for some assistance. Their wagon with one of the doctors should be here in a few minutes. I think I hear it now. We will make use of their wagon to take Mr. Conner to your house, doctor—and I will remain there and watch with you."

"I shall be glad to have you."

The detective was correct about thinking that he heard the approach of the wagon. It arrived in another moment, and great was the surprise when Nick told what had happened since he sent the telephonic message.

"It was my determination to do that which brought this all about," said the detective. "That old magician who was here in the back room saw that his own game—whatever it could have been—was up, and that he would have to light out with his 'corpse,' or have the 'corpse' exposed. He must have acted mighty quickly after I left the house, to have accomplished it all in the short time I was absent."

"How long were you away, Mr. Carter?"

"Less than half an hour, I should say. And here was Conner to throw into that cataleptic condition, and the two other men to hypnotize, and the problem of his getting away with the other cataleptic who was already here; for I am convinced now that he was not dead."

"Old Kalat might have brought the other one out of his condition," suggested the doctor.

"More than likely he did; and he got away by passing my guard at the rear door, whom he had hypnotized for the purpose. Kalat, as you call him, ought not to be hard to find."

The doctor smiled.

"My experience among these people, Mr. Carter," he said, "is that they are the most difficult to find, when they don't want to be discovered, of any people in the world. They seem to have the science of hiding themselves away reduced to an art, and to perfection. I doubt very much if you will see Kalat again until he is willing that you should see him."

Nick was silent while they were conveying Conner to the wagon preparatory to taking him around to the doctor's house on the next street; and there was little or nothing said until Conner was safely bestowed in the bed in the doctor's house, and they had seated themselves near him to watch and wait. Two of the guards, the one from the roof and one who had been at the front door, were left on guard at the house of Kalat.

"Now, doctor," said the detective, when they were comfortably seated, "I can see by your manner that you have got something on your mind that you would like to talk to me about, but that for some reason you are reluctant to speak. Out with it, doctor, whatever it is."

"You are right. I have got something to say, and I *am* reluctant to speak."

"Why?"

"Because I am afraid that you will misunderstand me."

"I will try not to do so; and I am good at understanding people."

"It is about these Orientals that I would speak."

"I supposed as much. I am anxious to talk about them, too; and before you begin what you have to say I would like to ask you a few questions."

"Very well."

"They may lead up naturally to what you wish to tell me about."

"Possibly they will. I think our minds are following along the same grooves at the present moment."

"There is no doubt of that."

"Well, Mr. Carter, what is it?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET OF THE DISAPPEARANCE.

"I wanted to ask you," began the detective, "to tell me what you thought about that other man whom I found in that house when we first arrived there? About the man whose place Conner was forced against his will to take."

"As you suppose, your question does lead up to exactly what I was contemplating telling you about. But I must tell you, in the beginning, that what I will say will be difficult of belief—of any belief at all. It would be only natural to call it preposterous."

"There are lots of preposterous things in the world."

"Yes, sir. Now as to your question."

"Yes?"

"I cannot answer it directly. I can only say this much to start with: I do not believe that the man you saw was dead. He was in the same cataleptic state in which your friend is lying now."

"That is what I thought about it."

"Mr. Carter, I came to this section of the city purposely to study some of the mysteries about these people that have interested me deeply. I appear among them as a poor man, and I live poorly and cheaply in order to carry out that deception."

"I understand. You are a student."

"Yes. I am, in fact, a very wealthy man who has a passion for scientific research. That explains my being here; it will also explain much that I will have to say to you."

"Exactly."

"Immediately after I left college, I traveled in Palestine. Later, I went across the mountains into Beyrut and from there to Syria. Among the mountains of Syria, directly west from the city of Damascus, I fell in with a strange people who practised a certain kind of magic, which is the most phenomenal of any with which I ever came in contact. They have two words in their own language which expresses it, but which are hard to translate."

"Give me an idea of them, if you can."

"The best definition I can give you is this: The two words mean, in effect, the 'fusion of souls into one master soul.' It is a little hard to understand, but as I proceed you will comprehend it better."

"I have no doubt of it."

"I must explain yet another thing. The word soul, as understood by them, is not at all our accepted meaning of the term."

"No? What is it?"

"Soul with them—that is, with this particular sect of whom I am speaking—means 'the element of being.' They explain that every entity is made up of many elements of being—in other words, of many souls. Do you understand?"

"I think so."

"Well, this sect to which I have called your attention practises a strange ceremony. I have never seen it done, but it has been described to me so that I know exactly how it is done—if it is carried out at all. It is so hard to believe, that I still doubt that it can be accomplished, as you will doubt."

"Go on, please."

"This ceremony is called 'The Change.' That is an exact translation of the word they use, but the change means much more than you would suppose. Their belief is that a man who submits himself to 'The Change,' and does it willingly, may, through the ministrations of one of the followers who is skilled in the art, assume any outward appearance he pleases, may attain to any accomplishment he covets, may become as handsome or as ugly, as good or as evil, as big or as little, as rich or as poor in mind as he desires, through the practise of this magic.

"Actually, so they teach, all that there is left of the original man after going through this phase of change is memory.

"The body has been altered, its shape changed, the color of the eyes is different, the hair may be any color, the voice will be different—absolutely everything is different, if it is desired, and only the memory of the past remains.

"They claim that it is accomplished by the fusion of souls: by the introduction of other souls into the body of the man who has retained of his own soul only the element of memory.

"It is a part of their religion that the souls of all creation are blended together to create the soul of a man; but that the other soul elements are so small that they do not count for much in the conduct of the man. Do you follow me?"

"I think so. You are getting rather deep, however."

"I will be as plain as I can. We know some men who are cunning and adroit; in such, the soul of the weasel, or the ferret, is largely in evidence. Another man is cruel to excess; in him the soul element of the tiger or the hyena or the wolf would be dominant, and so it goes through all the list of animals."

"But what about the change that you have described?"

"I am coming to that. We will say that I desire a change. Very well, I travel everywhere until I find one who has undergone 'The Change.' It is a strange part of this belief that only those who have undergone it can bring it about in another."

"And I suppose they keep on changing whenever they get tired of one——"

"Not at all. One change is for all time; for all eternity, in fact, for the man who has taken 'The Change' may not die; he must live on forever, unless he is killed, or kills himself by violence."

"I begin to understand you now."

"For that reason the followers of the ilk are slow to accept the change. They have told me that it is rarely practised among them unless one is a fugitive from the law, or is become old and wishes to live on and be young again. I have been told, also, that sooner or later all who undergo the change kill themselves in misery. Whatever they decide upon that they will have, or become, before the change is effected, must be their portion for all time."

"That is rather hard, when one comes to think of it," said the detective.

"Yes; for as we are, we are always susceptible to modification in our being. If I have an appetite for drink, I can overcome it, perhaps; after the change it would be impossible. If I am fat and would grow lean, or lean and would become fat, in my natural state either is comparatively easy of accomplishment. Not so after 'The Change.' Then, when that has taken place, if I am fat, I must remain so, and vice versa."

"But how is it all accomplished, according to these people?"

"I am coming to that. I have already stated that only a person who has already passed through 'The Change' can work it upon another."

"Yes."

"It is done by practising a form of hypnotism. The patient, if I may make use of the term, is thrown into the hypnotic state and held there for a considerable time. Cataleptic conditions are necessary. The patient is stripped of all clothing and is laid away in a room by himself, to await the gathering together of the souls or elements that are necessary to bring about the desired change."

"And then——"

"Then a greater or a lesser length of time elapses before the patient awakes, according to the magnitude of the change, or, as they express it, to the distance that the man's soul has to travel in order to make arrangements with the lesser souls to fuse with his own."

"It is all tommyrot, of course."

"It is tommyrot as we look at it, certainly; but that there is also something uncanny about it I have been brought to the point of reluctant belief."

"You have?"

"Yes. They are able, through some means which we do not understand, to perform a marvelous change in a person—a change which is so pronounced that you would not recognize your own friend there, had he passed through it; you would refuse to recognize him even though he swore to you that he was the same man."

"You won't be offended if I say that I don't believe it?"

"No. I do not expect you to believe it, on my statement. I will only add this: That I have seen men who have been so changed, and I have no doubt that the man you saw to-day, lying in that room where you and Mr. Conner found him, was undergoing 'The Change.'"

"By Jove!" the detective started to his feet.

"What is the matter?" asked the doctor.

"Nothing at present. I will explain later. Please go on. If he was really undergoing 'The Change,' it presupposes, does it not, that old Kalat, who was practising the art, has already been through it himself?"

"Most certainly."

"It has not occurred to you, doctor, to ask me what it was that brought me down into this section of the city."

"No; for I have guessed what it was. You see, Mr. Carter, I know who you are and what your business is, and therefore I naturally came to the conclusion that you were in this part of the city in search of a criminal of some sort. I also naturally supposed the criminal to be a Syrian, since the neighborhood you were searching is peopled almost entirely by them."

"You are right about that."

"Then it is more than likely that the man of whom you were in search has applied to old Kalat for 'The Change,' always provided that he knew about it."

"I supposed they all knew about it."

"Not by any means. The society which practises it is a very small one, comparatively speaking. I doubt if there are more than a dozen followers of the sect in this country. Possibly not so many."

"So few?"

"Yes. How did you happen to be searching the house of Kalat?"

"It was a wide search, doctor. His house merely came under the general necessity."

"You have been there before to-day?"

"Twice."

"And was there, at each time, a sick man there? Or a man who was supposed to be sick?"

"Yes."

"When did your search for the criminal begin?"

"It will be two weeks to-morrow since the man escaped from me, and disappeared as if the earth had opened and swallowed him."

"And Mr. Carter, it will be two weeks to-morrow since there has been a sick man at the house of Kalat. There is no doubt in my mind that the man you saw and whom you were told was dead was the very man of whom you are in search, undergoing 'The Change.'"

"But I saw him, looked at him, studied his features; there was not——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you. You were about to say that there was not the slightest resemblance between the two. But think a moment and remember if there was not a resemblance after all. There might have been great changes, but there would always be a strong suggestion of the real entity in the appearance of the man who had undergone 'The Change.'"

"So there was in this case, doctor. Conner said that Syrians are like Chinamen; that they all look more or less alike. But there was a resemblance."

"Then, Mr. Carter, I think that we have hit upon the secret of your mystery."

"It seems incredible. It is hard to believe."

"All important truths are difficult of belief at first. All great discoveries are, at the beginning, pronounced incredible, Mr. Carter."

"Perhaps you are right, doctor."

CHAPTER VII.

CONNER'S MYSTERIOUS JOURNEY.

The detective left his chair and walked across the room to the bedside, where he remained for several moments gazing down upon the still, corpselike face of Conner.

Presently he turned away with a sigh and asked:

"Do you really think, doctor, that there is no cause for uneasiness about my friend?"

"I did not say that, Mr. Carter," was the reply. "I said I hoped there was none."

"You mean——"

"I mean that I do not know just how far old Kalat has gone in his experiment upon Mr. Conner. It is true that he had very little time, but with one who is expert in those practises, I don't think that a very great deal of time is necessary."

"You are still leaving me very much in the dark, doctor."

"Well, I will reply to you in this way, then: I have been assured, and I have reason to believe, that these soul-changers make use of their arts for the purposes of revenge. I think that if Kalat had had time to do all that he wished to do, he would have wrought one of his mysterious changes upon your friend. Whether he could have done so, in the short time he had at his disposal, I do not know. If he did—if he could have done it—we will begin to notice a change presently, and really, if that should happen, I would not know how to stop it. I——"

Nick Carter bounded to his feet.

"You have said quite enough, doctor, to determine me what to do. We won't sit here and wait any longer, if you please," he said. "We will get busy right away and do all that is known to science to bring Conner out of that condition. No matter what the consequences, get busy right now."

"The galvanic battery is the only remedy that I think——"

"Then get one and apply it. Get two. Good Heaven! If there is the ghost of a chance that Conner may be made a victim of any such thing as that, do you suppose I am going to sit down here and twirl my thumbs until it happens? Not much. I would as soon see him dead, and he would sooner be dead himself, than to have

an experiment such as you have outlined performed upon him."

"You are giving the subject much more credence than you did at first," said the doctor, with a quiet smile.

"No; I am not. Not an atom; but I am not taking any chances in a matter that is as serious as this one. Get busy with your battery, doctor."

"I should like to call in another physician to assist me."

"Call a dozen, if you like; only hurry."

The doctor went to his telephone, and when he returned he remarked:

"One of my friends who has sometimes assisted me in my studies will be here presently."

We need not here enter into all that was done to bring Conner back to his senses and to restore him to life. We need not describe the heroic measures that they were in the end obliged to adopt to produce any results at all. We need only state that the two doctors and Nick Carter worked together for five long hours over the prostrate Conner before he began to show at all any response to their efforts.

Many times during those five hours Nick almost despaired of success. Many times he began to think that his friend was lost beyond recall; but at last, when hope was almost dead, a flush began to steal into the forehead and then into the cheeks of the unconscious man, and it was noticeable that his joints were less rigid, his muscles less tied, his flesh less hard.

"We are going to win," said the doctor, smiling up at Nick at last.

"Yes. I think so now."

"It has been a hard fight, Mr. Carter."

"It has been the fight of my life," replied the detective grimly.

"Had we waited a little longer, we might not have succeeded at all. It was fortunate that you insisted upon the effort when you did."

"I think so."

Then they worked on again in silence, the three of them; and at last the moment came when Conner drew a long sigh, and after that his respiration became with every minute more normal until at last he was breathing quite naturally.

But it was still another hour before he opened his eyes and looked around him.

He discovered Nick's face bending over him, smiled a little and closed his eyes again, and then another half-hour passed before he opened them once more. When he did so, he spoke in a low tone that was almost inaudible.

"Nick," he said.

"Yes, Con, I am right here," was the instant reply.

"I have been a devil of a time getting back to you, haven't I?" came the next question; and then, before Nick could answer, he went on: "But it was a devil of a ways to come, so I suppose that accounts for it. I have been sort of standing beside myself looking on while you three fellows have been struggling, you see. You didn't know that, did you?"

"No," replied the detective, and he glanced significantly toward the doctor.

But Conner saw the glance and interpreted it correctly, for he smiled again.

"Oh, I am not woozy," he said. "I know what I am talking about—if you don't. I think the doctor understands me."

"Yes," said the doctor. "I understand."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed the detective, "that you have been conscious all the time of what has been happening in this room?"

"No. Not all the time, Nick. But for a long time I have. I will tell you about it presently."

"All right. I can wait, Con."

There was another interval after that, during which they all waited in patience until Conner should recover more strength; but another half-hour passed before he reached out his hand toward Nick, and said, with a smile:

"Help me to sit up, Nick."

"Yes," said the doctor. "I think it would be better now, and hasten things somewhat if Mr. Conner were taken from the bed and seated in one of these chairs; and I am going to ask him not to talk until I have given him a cup of strong coffee. It is already brewing, so it will not be long in preparation."

The doctor returned after a bit with the coffee; and after Conner had swallowed a cup full of it, he remarked:

"That puts new life into me. Now, Nick, would you mind telling me who it was that hit me? It couldn't have been that old chap at the house, could it?" I

wouldn't have supposed he was strong enough to strike such a blow as that."

"What are you talking about, Conner?"

"I am asking you who hit me?"

"You tell us about the blow first, and then we will explain," interposed the doctor, with a meaning smile toward the detective.

"I don't seem to know much about it, sir," Conner replied slowly. "I suppose you are a doctor, aren't you?"

"Yes. I was called in to attend upon you."

"Well, Carter left me in charge of the supposed dead man, while he went to the telephone to call up the board of health. Carter didn't believe the man was dead, and after he was gone, as I stood there looking down at the fellow, I somehow came to the conclusion that Nick was right about it. I bent a little closer over him, to study his features more carefully, and I could have sworn at one instant that I saw signs of life in the supposed corpse. I got a little closer to him, when something like a sandbag or a lead pipe hit me over the head, and that is the last I remember until I saw you all working over me in this room."

"*Saw* us working over you?" exclaimed Nick.

"Well, I don't suppose that is the proper word. I will change it; until I knew that you were working over me, and yet I could not move or speak to let you understand that I did know it. Do you understand that?"

"I do," replied the doctor.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing. I have had rather remarkable dreams since I have been under the influence of that blow; or perhaps of the drugs that you have been giving me. Say, isn't it rather funny that my head isn't sore, Nick? That blow must have almost cracked my skull."

"Tell us about your dreams," said the doctor, before the detective could reply.

"Do you really wish to hear about them, or are you only humoring me?"

"We really wish to hear about them, Mr. Conner."

"I have only been wandering in my head."

"Tell us about the wandering, then."

"Well, it seemed to me as if I were traveling a long way from home. Once, several years ago, I was in Egypt for a time, and during this dream I appeared to be there again. Not in any part of it that I seemed to have visited before, but the scenery was practically the same, so I somehow knew it was Egypt."

"Yes."

"I seemed to be skipping about in great haste, from place to place, trying to overtake some one. Now I would be in a jungle where there were wild beasts, and again in a city of the East where the people were crowded together; and then, Nick, I saw Selim. He did not look like Selim, either; he seemed to look very much like that chap I was watching when you went to the telephone; but I knew it was Selim; and the funny part of it was that we seemed to be jolly good friends, and both afraid that you—*you*, mind you—were going to catch us.

"After that, Selim and I seemed to be traveling in company, led by an old man who leered at us strangely. We were all trying to accomplish something that was mysterious, only I did not seem to know what it was. Selim kept assuring me all the time that it was all right, and the strange thing about it was that I believed him."

"Go on, Con. Go on. It is all very strange."

"All of a sudden I felt an uncontrollable desire to get back to you, Nick. I broke away from the old man and Selim, and seemed to run. They chased me and overtook me, but I broke away from them again, and that sort of thing was repeated over and over until I was so tired that I could hardly keep going. It seemed as though I could hear your voice calling all the time."

"I reckon you did, Con."

"And then those two left me and I started on alone, and it certainly was a long distance that I had to come. Then I got here into this room; it was a room that I had never been in before, but I knew that you were here and that others were with you. The strange thing about it was that I couldn't make you understand that I knew; and then I suddenly realized that there was something the matter with me and that you were all working over me to beat the band, to bring me out of some sort of a fainting fit, or something like that; and then I opened my eyes and saw you, although it had seemed to me before that I saw you all the time."

"Is that all, Con?"

"Yes. It is all that you do not know about. But it was all a dream, of course. I was only hit on the head with a sandbag, wasn't I, and knocked out; eh?"

"You were knocked out, all right. How do you feel now?"

"Bully."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said the detective fervently.

"Amen," quoth Conner, smiling.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAN IN SEARCH OF VENGEANCE.

It was some time before Conner could be made to understand just what had occurred to him; but when it was finally brought home to him that he had been hypnotized and thrown into a cataleptic state, his righteous anger was almost ludicrous.

"I'll swear," he told Doctor Steintart, "that it seemed exactly like a blow on the head."

"Yes," replied the physician. "It would have that effect."

"So the old chap made his getaway, did he?" Conner continued, turning to Nick. "He got away and took the corpse with him. Well, he deserves a chance for his liberty after that."

"I have decided," said the detective, "that the 'corpse' of that room was really Selim, after all."

"The devil you have! Well, that is like my dream. But you know that it was *not* Selim. It was some other fellow that looked like him, but who wasn't him."

"Con, there are things about this case that I will not stop to explain to you now, but which will keep until later. I will tell you all about it before very long; but just now you need not be impatient."

"Oh, I'm not impatient."

"Well, the doctor has succeeded in convincing me that the 'corpse' was really Selim, who had undergone a strange ceremony which was intended to disguise him so that we would never know him. He was recovering from the effects of it when we found him, and but for the accident of my sending for the board of health to investigate, we would never have found out the truth. But you see the old man who was performing the operation could not afford to have the health board fooling around him, and he saw that it was imperative that he should light out about as soon as possible. That is the reason for your falling a victim to his science."

"Well, what is to be done now?"

"Are you entirely all right again, Con?"

"Yes; as well as I ever was;" and he rose and stretched his long body, and smiled down at the detective with his old, confident air. "I'd like to get my two hands on that old duffer who hit me with the club," he finished.

"What do you propose to do next?" the doctor asked of the detective, a few moments later, when Conner had gone from the room for a moment, and left them alone together.

"I don't know," replied Nick. "I have felt since Conner came around all right that I would appreciate it if you would advise with me a little, doctor. You see, you know these people a great deal better than I do. I think it is the first time that I ever had anything directly to do with the Syrians. I know very little about them; and especially do I know very little indeed about this particular class of them, who practise these strange rites."

"I suppose you regard it as of vital importance that you should find this man you seek?"

"I certainly do."

"You would not abandon the pursuit?"

"No. It is a question of honor, of pride, of professional duty, and of individual will that I follow that fellow to the end of the world, but what I catch him. If you really think that the suggestions you have made are true, then I feel in my case that it is up to me to take all the benefits you are willing to give me as the result of your researches and studies."

"You are certainly welcome to all the aid I can give you."

"Well, then, I must begin by stating that I cannot accept as truth all the ideas that you have advanced. It tends too much toward the supernatural, and in this material age the supernatural and the occult are generally scouted."

"That is true. But you have seen enough to-day, Mr. Carter, to make you admit that there is something here that you do not understand and cannot explain."

"Yes. I admit that."

"And you really do wish my aid?"

"I really do, doctor. I was about to say that we will start on the hypothesis that all you suspect as truth, *is* truth. We will go ahead on the idea that Kalat can and did put Selim into a sort of trance, the purpose being to transform him into the semblance of another person entirely, so that I would never be able to recognize him."

"Well?"

"For the future conduct of this case, we will regard all that as a self-evident truth. Now what would you do to find Selim?"

The doctor smiled broadly.

"You are getting down to cases with a vengeance," he said.

"That is my way. I never let the grass grow under my feet. We will say that the 'corpse' chap was Selim."

"Yes."

"Do you suppose that by now he is awake, like Conner is, and walking around on his own legs, laughing at me?"

"No; I suppose quite to the contrary. In other words, that he is in precisely the same condition that he was in when you saw him."

"Then how did Kalat get him out of the house?"

"Doubtless he restored him sufficiently so that he could walk, and then led him away. That would be why he was compelled to throw those two guards into a hypnotic sleep; so that he might pass them with his charge."

"And after he had gotten Selim safely out of the house, he put him again into the cataleptic state? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Then he has another place somewhere in which to hide him away?"

"Without doubt."

"Is it necessary, according to your understanding of these performances, that he should keep Selim in that condition so long a time?"

"It is necessary that he should continue him in that condition until 'The Change' has taken place."

"And how long would that be, do you think?"

"It depends, as I have been told, upon what the patient wished before he went into the operation, or upon what the magician wishes to do with him—as the case may be."

"That does not seem to answer my question."

"Well, my studies of the subject have taught me that the person undergoing the change may remain in the cataleptic state from three days to three or four months."

"Gee! Then we have no means of knowing how much longer Selim is going to lie somewhere like a corpse, waiting for the complete change to be wrought."

"No."

"It strikes me that if it was Selim we saw there, he is pretty thoroughly changed already, doctor."

"In appearance—yes; but not in fact."

"According to our ideas he has already been in that condition two weeks."

"Yes."

"Then it is safe to assume that he will come out of it before very long. If it was Selim, he wouldn't want to be tied down in that manner very long. I know the fellow."

"Then you know that they are as patient as Indians in seeking their revenge. If you were to tell me the full story about Selim, possibly I could advise better."

"That's so. I hadn't thought of that. Well, here it is."

And the detective told the entire story with which Selim was associated.*

When he finished the doctor remarked:

"It is my opinion, Mr. Carter, that you have done three things to win the eternal enmity of a man like that Syrian. The first one was when you recovered the plates and bonds and other things and forever deprived him of the possibility of possessing them. The second was when he discovered that you had really used him as a means to that end, and had done it without letting him suspect what you were doing. The third was when you told him that now that his usefulness was past, he must be returned to the Tombs, there to await trial for his crimes. He could not forgive all those things."

"No."

"His first thought would be vengeance."

"I suppose so."

"And now we have proof—or at least I regard it as proof—that he was already a member of the secret society which practises 'The Change.'"

"We will admit that."

"Then the logical conclusion is that as soon as he succeeded in escaping from your house he came directly to this quarter of the city, and searched out and found old Kalat. He would have experienced no difficulty in making himself known to the old fellow, even if they had not met before. He would have related something of his experiences with you; he would have proclaimed that he wished to undergo 'The Change.' He would have demanded it in the name of vengeance—and what think you he would have asked to be changed into?"

"I give it up, doctor. This ghost business is rather too much for me."

"I know these people; shall I suggest?"

"Yes."

"He would want the strength of a giant, the subtlety of a snake, the wisdom of Solomon, the fury and cruelty

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 587.

of a tiger, and so on ad libitum. He is young enough to wish to be handsome, and vain enough to wish to appear distinguished—hence the gray hair. His whole idea would be fixed relentlessly upon vengeance, for he would know that with the other accomplishments he had demanded in 'The Change,' he could soon acquire worldly goods, after he had satisfied his hopes for revenge. Well, the question that I would like to get at right now is where to look for him. I do not have to wait until he is restored to consciousness, if that was Selim."

"Certainly not."

"Then, if I could lay my hands on that cataleptic body I'd simply make a prisoner of it and set a watch upon it, so that we would be at hand when it comes around. Old Kalat decamped from his house. He has gone. He took the 'corpse' with him. Where would you, in my place, look for it?"

"I don't think I can make a suggestion as to that."

"You don't know enough about these people to suggest a possible hiding-place?"

"No; but I should say that Kalat would be governed, under such circumstances, by the conditions that surrounded him, and that he would act just as any other shrewd man would act under compulsion, and that he would act without regard to nationality. In a word, I think his very first move would be to leave the Syrian quarter of the city."

"I have been thinking that same thing."

"What would you do, Mr. Carter, if you were now in Kalat's place and he in yours?"

"I would change my entire mode of living, and hide myself away where the other fellow would be least likely to search for me."

"Where, as in this case, would that be?"

"I might answer that question better if I knew whether Kalat had any money or not."

"I can reply to that. He does not want for money. Here, in this quarter, he is reputed to be immensely rich."

"Then—by Jove! if that were the situation and I was in his place, I would hire a furnished house somewhere, no matter what it cost; I would fill it with a corps of servants, and I'd run my own establishment until I was ready to come out into the open."

"Possibly," suggested the doctor, "some such idea as that has occurred to Kalat."

CHAPTER IX.

THE AWAKENING OF A HUMAN FIEND.

Again it becomes necessary that we should regard the opposite side of the case for a time, for this one was rather different from any case that Nick Carter ever handled before.

We must return, then, to old Kalat, at the moment when the detective announced his determination to call in the board of health and to have the case of the supposed dead man in the parlor inquired into.

Kalat watched the departure of Nick with an evil leer in his beady eyes; and no sooner was the detective out of the house than he began his own methods for escaping with the unconscious Selim, from that quarter of the city.

Expert as he was in the arts of hypnotism, practised adept as he was in all things that pertained to it, it was a simple matter for him to overcome his victims, provided he could take them unawares.

Conner's occupation at the time happened to be exactly what the old man would have wished; for Conner, be it remembered, according to the story he related to Nick and the doctor, was absorbed in his contemplation of the supposed corpse.

He was bending over him, studying him carefully, with his eyes and his mind fixed in a concentrated manner upon the apparently dead man.

Any hypnotist who puts you under the influence of that strange power will hand you a crystal to gaze into its depths, or a coin to fix your eyes upon, or will hold up a pencil and tell you to look fixedly at the point of it.

The whole idea of this is to focus your thoughts and attention upon one point, and while you are in that condition, you are literally unguarded at all other points. It is then that the hypnotist can slip in past your guard, so to speak, and make you captive.

Conner was therefore unconsciously playing directly into the old man's hands at that moment.

He was regarding the silent figure before him fixedly. He was bending over him. He was oblivious to all other considerations save that one, and he was unguarded.

Kalat discovered that fact when he crept cautiously to the door of the room.

He had only to steal up behind Conner, and to exert his powers as his science had taught him how to do; and then the blow fell.

It was a mental blow, of course; not a physical one, but it had all the sensation to Conner of the real thing.

It was as if a bludgeon had descended upon his head and knocked him senseless, and he fell and succumbed.

Kalat's next move was to run to the rear of the house and to call one of the guards to him, saying that the detective wanted him a moment; and once he had the man inside the door of the house, he had only to say to him, "Look there!" to get him instantly under his control. Then he called the second man and served him in the same manner—and the coast was clear for the other things he wished to do.

Much of what he really did do at that time is guesswork, but considerable of it is also known, so the conjectures are based upon logical reasoning throughout.

He doubtless returned at once to the parlor and made his mysterious passes over the unconscious form of Selim, until he had relieved the stiffness of the joints and the hardness of the flesh—until, in a word, he had dispelled the cataleptic condition.

Then, at a command to rise, Selim would obey.

He walked after his master, like one who walks in sleep. He was in a state of absolute obedience. That much is known.

And Kalat got a few things hastily together, and led his charge through the now unguarded rear door, into the yard, through several others, and finally out upon the street at a considerable distance away, concealing their persons under cloaks which at that distance, hid their identities.

And so they passed from that neighborhood.

The doctor has already informed us that Kalat, among his own people, was regarded as a rich man. It is certain that he was well provided with money, for he presently stopped at a drug-store and with the telephone ordered a carriage; and when the carriage came, the two were driven away, presumably to the Grand Central Station, for that was the order he was heard to give to the driver.

What he really did do was to change his conveyance several times, and ultimately to bring up at an apartment-hotel in one of the streets among the forties, where he engaged rooms for himself and his brother, paying two days in advance. Then he sent for one of his three friends whom we have seen before—the man called Hosmek—and leaving him in charge of the patient, went out.

That same afternoon, while Nick and Conner and the doctor were still discussing the case, the three were driven away from the hotel in a close automobile, and taken into the country, where, through the assistance of a real estate agent, Kalat had been able to hire temporarily a furnished cottage with ground around it.

It was a cottage situated on the outskirts of one of the Oranges, in New Jersey, and so expeditious had Kalat been in his movements, that the three were installed there by nine o'clock that evening.

In the meantime the two other Syrians had been sent for, and were installed in the house in Jersey, in the capacity of servants, and as Kalat never stirred out of doors, never even appeared at a window, and inasmuch as the three Syrians who served him had never been known to be associated with the case by Nick Carter, there was very little chance that they would be discovered, at least until the period of waiting was over, and Selim should have undergone "The Change."

During the days that followed, Kalat's only occupation was in sitting near Selim's couch watching him and ministering to him.

Twice in each twenty-four hours he restored him sufficiently to consciousness so that he could eat and otherwise perform the functions of a human being; but beyond that he continued to lie as Nick and Conner had seen him, to all outward appearances dead.

Once each night, at midnight, the four men gathered around the couch upon which Selim was laid, and went through certain forms of chants and incantations—they called them ceremonies—after which all but one of them retired.

But Selim was never left for a moment unguarded, and as the time drew nearer to the final outcome of it, there was a condition of suppressed excitement about them that was interesting, or would have been so could it have been witnessed.

And so the first week and much of the second week after the events described in the last chapter went past, and all the time Nick and Conner, with the aid of the doctor, who was with them much of the time, kept up the search for the fugitives.

They found where Kalat had taken the carriage; they finally succeeded in tracing the man to the hotel uptown; but there all trace of him was lost entirely.

The automobile that had taken them from the hotel could not be found at all, and there was left behind absolutely no clue to what had become of the Syrians.

Time keeps on moving no matter what else stops, and

so the days merged into other days, until at last the morning of the thirtieth one after Selim's visit to Kalat dawned over the house in Jersey.

It was to be a great day for Kalat, since his patient was to awaken, and "The Change" was to be an accomplished fact.

It happened that evening.

The three men, with Kalat, were seated around Selim's couch waiting for the moment when he would open his eyes, and Hosmek in particular, who desired the change himself, was bending forward eagerly when Kerak al Dimeshk started wide-awake.

For a moment he gazed from face to face of those who were gathered around him. Then he sat up and looked around him.

"So!" he exclaimed in his own tongue. "So you are all of you here yet. How long have I been sleeping?"

"Your slumber has been long and undisturbed, my brother," responded Kalat.

Then it happened that Selim looked about him and discovered that the room was not the same as the one in which he had gone to sleep.

"What witchery is this?" he exclaimed angrily. "This is not the same room in which I dropped into sleep."

"No," replied Kalat. "It is not the same."

"Where are we, then? Where are we now?"

"We have removed ourselves across the river from the city. We are in another State, my brother," replied Kalat mildly.

"Ha! Did you make the change in the night, while I slept?"

"In the night? No; we made it in the day-time."

"In the day? How was that? How long ago? When?"

"Two weeks ago; a little more, to be exact."

"Two weeks? Two—*what?*"

"Two weeks ago, my brother."

Selim leaped to his feet with flaming eyes and face convulsed with rage, so that each of the men involuntarily shrank from him.

"What does it mean?" he demanded. "How long have I been dead to the world?"

"You have been absent from us for thirty days," replied Kalat mildly, for he was becoming frightened at this devil his science had created.

"Thirty days?" cried out Selim, with the light of unconquerable rage in his eyes, with his lips drawn over his teeth after the manner of an angry dog, with his fingers twitching cruelly. "Do you mean, you old villain, that you have kept me in that condition for thirty long, interminable days?"

"It was necessary, Kerak."

"Necessary? And what now becomes of my revenge? Where is the change I would have wrought upon me?"

"Look into the glass and you will observe it."

"Bah! What becomes of my revenge, fool?"

"It is awaiting you."

"Awaiting me? After thirty days? And all this time my enemies whom I would kill are laughing at me for a coward; are thinking that I was afraid to carry out my threat. Where is Nick Carter?"

"He is searching for you, but he has not found you."

"Searching for me while I have been lying here helpless, under your spell. I'll show you how I repay such service as that. I'll show you!"

With a growl of savage fury, and with a leap that was as quick as the movements of a tiger, he sprang past the others and seized the old man by the throat, while the others looked upon the scene in such terror that they could not move.

And Selim, having seized his victim, held him so, all the time closing down more and more tightly with his relentless fingers, until at last the figure of Kalat hung in his grasp, motionless and dead.

Then, with a wild laugh, Selim released his hold; and he laughed again as the lifeless form collapsed upon the floor.

And then he turned his attention to the others.

CHAPTER X.

A QUADRUPLE CRIME.

It was the morning following upon the awakening of Selim from his long sleep when Nick Carter, upon opening his paper at the breakfast-table and glancing over its contents, presently uttered an exclamation of surprise, and, pushing his nearly finished meal aside, started to his feet.

"Con," he exclaimed, "we have got a clue at last; or at least it looks like one to me."

"What is it, Nick?" asked Conner, who had been making his preparations to return to Washington that day.

"There has been a triple murder, committed over in Jersey, on the outskirts of one of the Oranges, and all three of the victims are Syrians. Two of the men were choked to death, as if by a man of gigantic strength; the third had his skull crushed as if it were an egg-shell."

"Tell me some more about it, Nick," said Conner, interested.

The detective had been rapidly scanning the article, and now he laid the paper down for a moment and replied:

"It seems that a policeman in passing the house—a small house in a big yard—shortly after midnight, discovered that it was afire. There was a fire-box near him, and he sent in an alarm. Then he rushed into the house, and in the back parlor discovered three dead men on the floor. He was dragging them outside when the fire-engines arrived on the scene."

"What happened then?"

"The fire was extinguished without having done much damage, but it seems to remain a total mystery regarding who could have committed the deed. The account says that four men were known to have been occupying the house at the time, one of whom was an invalid, or was at least so reported. The so-called invalid is among the slain, and one of the men is missing. It is supposed that he may be the murderer, only that he was a puny sort of a chap, called Hosmek, who, the police say, could not have done it. In conclusion, the whole affair is attributed to some clannish warfare among themselves."

"One of these men might have been Selim, Nick."

"I don't think there is any doubt of it. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then let's get over there as soon as possible. Just wait, though, while I telephone to Doctor Steinhart to meet us at the train in Jersey."

On the way to the ferry and across it both men were rather silent, for both were thinking deeply, when they were not buried in the different accounts of the affair that appeared in the morning papers.

The doctor met them at the train, and he also had read the accounts in some of the papers.

"What do you think of it, doctor?" asked Nick.

"I hardly know what to reply," said the doctor. "It certainly looks to me as if it were an aftermath of the experiences you have been having. In a word, Mr. Carter, I should say that your man Selim has awakened from his cataleptic nap, transformed into a fury, and that, angered about something, he has murdered the men who were caring for him."

"But here are three dead men and a fourth who has disappeared—and the fourth does not answer to any description we have of Selim or of what he might have become."

"No. These were doubtless other members of the order."

When the three men left the station at their destination, they hurried at once to the place where the bodies had been taken, and, of course, it required only a glance for Nick and Conner, as well as the doctor, to recognize the body of Kalat. The remaining two, the doctor remembered to have seen around the Syrian quarter in the city from time to time, and two or three times had seen them at Kalat's house.

While they were discussing it, a policeman in plain clothes approached them, and shook hands with Nick Carter, whom he happened to know.

"I suppose you have heard about the other fellow?" he asked of Nick.

"No. What other fellow?"

"The one called Hosmek; the one who disappeared."

"What about him?"

"He has been found."

"Indeed. Is he dead, also?"

"Yes; like two of the others, choked to death. He had been thrown among some bushes at the rear of the house, as if he had followed the murderer outside, and had been attacked out there. My! but that fellow must have had the strength of ten men. Do you notice the terrible grip he had on these throats?"

"Yes."

"What do you make of it all, Mr. Carter?"

"Nothing as yet. Were the four the only persons who lived in that house?"

"Yes. There was a rumor at one time that there was another, but I don't think there was any foundation for it."

"Probably not. What is the theory of your police as to who did these murders?"

"We suppose that it was some war among themselves. We have no other explanation to offer at present, anyhow."

"What is known about these people, Rich?"

"Nothing at all, save that they went to that house to live, a little more than two weeks ago. That fellow there was reported to be an invalid, and never left the house or showed himself at the windows, even. The other three attended to all the duties of the place."

"And the other? The fifth man?"

"We don't think there was a fifth man."

"Oh! I see. Well, I do. There was a fifth man, Rich; you may depend upon that; and it was the fifth man who was the invalid, and that man there who took care of him. It was also the fifth man who was the murderer."

"I don't see how you make all that out of what little is to be seen here."

"I don't. It wouldn't be fair for you to think that; but this matter is associated with another case of mine."

"Do you care to walk around to the house where these men were killed?"

"Yes. It will do no harm, and it may do some good. What do you think about it all, doctor? What is your opinion?"

"It is the same as I expressed on the train. I think that Selim has waked up angry, and that, having demanded a ferocious nature when he demanded 'The Change,' he has murdered these men with the same deliberation he would have used in breaking a twig in pieces."

"Well," said the detective, with a grim smile, "there is one comfort about the whole affair, anyway."

"What is that?"

"This: If Selim is so changed after what he has gone through that he could not be identified with the old Selim and could not, therefore, be convicted of his former crimes, he has certainly committed enough under his new form to send him to the chair, anyhow. And it doesn't much matter what crime he is convicted of so long as he does go to the chair; eh?"

"You're right."

"What in the world are you talking about?" asked the officer, who had listened in amazement.

"I couldn't explain it if I tried," replied the detective. "There is a mystery here which is too much for me, and would, therefore, be too much for you. But we think we know already who committed these crimes, and we think that we will be able to find him before long, too."

"By Jove! I wish I could go with you."

"You may. You shall bring Selim back to 'Jersey justice' when we have found him."

"Thank you very much."

"Carter," said the doctor, as they walked along together, "do you know where you should look for Selim, now?"

"I hadn't begun to think much about it yet, doctor."

"He won't be very far from you, or your house."

"Do you think he will begin the campaign at once?"

"He is now a man of one overpowering passion, and is egged on to the fulfilment of it by a thousand other things that he has demanded as a part of his new being."

"Do you think it will be the man we saw at the house of Kalat?"

"There isn't any doubt of it."

They found other policemen at the house where the crimes were committed, and Nick spent a few minutes in looking over the premises.

There was no proof that any robbery had been committed. True, there was not a cent of money to be found on the premises, and it was generally supposed that those who had lived there were always well supplied with cash. But there was no evidence that any had been taken.

"I think," said Nick, as they were turning away to go to the station, "that I can just about see how all this happened, last night, doctor."

"Can you?"

"Yes; supposing all the things you have explained to me are correct, and 'The Change' can be wrought in a man, as you have described."

"How does it look to you, then?"

"Why, like this: Selim has waked up and found out that he had been lying asleep for thirty long days. His pride was hurt. He was angry. He believed that I would have concluded that he was only a bluffer, and not one to carry out his vengeances. The thing doubtless made him angry, and he set about killing the whole bunch."

"I think you are right. It is in accordance with my other surmises about the case, too, Mr. Carter."

"How so?"

"You will remember that we discussed what sort of a character Selim would ask to have given him when he underwent 'The Change'?"

"Yes."

"And we agreed that he would want great strength, great ferocity, great cunning, and sagacity? Well, we see here sufficient evidence that we were correct in that surmise. We see the great strength in the manner of his killing his victims; we see the ferocity in the wanton crimes themselves; we see the cunning in his escaping with only the cash in the house and leaving the jewelry behind him, so that no robbery would appear on the face of it."

"Yes; and we also see his cunning in getting rid of his associates; but not his cunning in laying himself liable to discovery for these crimes."

"Probably he looked in the mirror before he left the house and saw the change that had been wrought in his appearance. He could not know that you had seen him since the alteration in his personal appearance, and, therefore, it would not occur to him that you would recognize him now, if you should see him."

"Well, you may be sure of one thing: If I happen to run across that fellow I saw in the house of Kalat, in the Syrian quarter, I shall not lose any time in making the arrest."

"I hope not."

"And I'll run across him before long, too. I believe in the queer business that far, at least."

"You will find that he is Selim, and that he will confess it—after you have him once."

"I begin to think so, too."

"And you will find that he is looking for you as earnestly as you are looking for him."

"By Jingo, I hope he is, doctor! I do."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WITH THE DEVIL'S SMILE.

Nick Carter quite agreed with the physician in the opinion he had expressed so forcibly, that Selim would be looking for the detective as eagerly as Nick was looking for him. He thought he had a fairly good idea of the character of the Syrian, and he believed that the fellow would regard the thirty days he had passed in undergoing "The Change" as so much time lost, or foolishly wasted in the accomplishment of his revenge.

If that were so, now that he was awake again he would certainly lose no time in thrusting himself into the presence of Nick Carter, and in endeavoring to fulfil his sworn oath that he would be revenged without more delay.

Doubtless, too, the fellow now supposed that he was as strong, or even stronger, than the detective; doubtless he believed that he was powerful enough to overcome Nick Carter, in a hand-to-hand combat; and indeed, judging from the evidences seen that morning, it would seem that he might not be far wrong in this idea.

But Nick and the doctor had both forgotten one important thing about the change that had been wrought in Selim.

They had considered altogether too much the ferocity and strength of the man, and not enough the wisdom and cunning that he had asked to be endowed with.

If he had the strength, he also had the wisdom that told him how to use it; if he had the ferocity, he also possessed the cunning which would teach him to utilize it to the best advantage.

Nick and Conner bade the doctor good-by at the New York end of the ferry, and went together to the detective's house.

Without admitting as much to each other, both kept their eyes open all the time, looking for and fully expecting to see, Selim standing somewhere near the house, on the watch and waiting for the appearance of the detective.

But there was no sign of him anywhere, and presently they ran up the steps and entered, the detective remarking as they did so:

"We will have our luncheon and then go out and see if we can hunt the fellow up, Con."

"That's a good idea. No good waiting till he comes to you, although I think as you do, that he won't lose much time in doing that very thing."

"He would probably wait until night, however," said Nick, as he closed the door and turned to encounter Joseph, who was standing ready to take their hats.

"Anybody been here, Joseph?" the detective asked, in a perfunctory manner.

"Yes, sir. One gentleman called about half an hour after you went out. He would not leave his name or any message, so I cannot tell you who he was. He was rather a remarkable-looking man, however, sir."

"Indeed. How so?" and Nick cast a furtive glance toward Conner.

"He was a very handsome man, sir, although rather dark of complexion. His face was quite young, although his hair was as white as snow. His eyes were very large and round and black, and, altogether, he was one of the most remarkable-looking men I have ever seen. But I think it was his smile that made the greatest impression upon me."

"How was that, Joseph?"

"It made me shudder."

"Made you shudder?"

"Yes. There was something so wicked about it; something so terrifying. The man seemed to be threatening something with death when he smiled; and when he asked for you I think his expression was—well, like the expression you could imagine that Satan would have if Satan were a particularly handsome man."

"That is not a bad description, Joseph. Tell me about the call, and what he had to say."

"I answered his ring and went to the door. He was standing close against it, so that if he had wished to do so he might have forced his way inside before I could have closed it. I was startled, although I did not say so."

"Naturally."

"He asked if you were in, and I told him you were not. He asked where you had gone, and I replied that I did not know. He asked when you would return, and I said that it was uncertain; that if he would leave his name and a telephonic address, I could inform him when you were at home. He said it did not matter, and turned away. I watched him to the bottom of the steps, when he turned and gave one of those queer smiles of his, and said:

"'Tell your master, when he returns, that I will call again.' Then I thought he chuckled to himself as he walked away."

"Joseph, do you remember Selim, who escaped from the strong room on the top floor?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, that man was Selim."

"Oh, no, sir. Pardon me, but it was not. I remember him perfectly, and I would have known him instantly—although, now that you have mentioned the name, I should not wonder if this man was a Syrian. He had something of the same general look."

"Exactly. It was Selim, very cleverly disguised, and he came here to kill me if he could."

"I don't think it possible that this man was Selim, sir," insisted Joseph.

The two detectives continued on their way to the study, and Nick remarked:

"Well, he has been here. He has begun the dance, Conner."

"Yes. I think he ought to come again before very long, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think that we would find the fellow all the quicker by remaining at the house than we would by going out to search the streets for him?"

"It is likely enough; but I think I will go out, just the same. I have a fancy that the fellow's conceit will make him wish to show off around some of the hotels this afternoon. I shall go around to the Knickerbocker, the Astor, the Waldorf, the Manhattan, the Gotham, the Holland, and a few more of them; just for a look in, you know, to see if he is anywhere about, and then I will return here. I will stop for a moment at the Mammoth on the way back. You can remain here, if you like."

"No, I think I will go with you."

It was two o'clock when they started out together and began the rounds that Nick had outlined.

In visiting the different hotels, whenever Nick espied a clerk behind the desk with whom he was particularly well acquainted, he gave a description of Selim, as he remembered him as he had last seen him at the house of Kalat, and asked each time if he had been seen; and in all of the hotels they visited, but two, received an affirmative reply.

"It is a pretty safe proposition that Selim is looking for you in the same places where you are looking for him," said Conner. "He seems to be making the rounds in the same direction and to be keeping just a little ahead of us."

"It does look that way, Con."

"His career ought to be cut very short."

"It will be, as soon as we run afoul of him. Just think what he has done already, in the short time he has been on earth the second time—if I may express it in that manner. He now has four crimes to his discredit, and he is likely to accumulate more of them if he is allowed to run loose. Con, if there is truth and not chicanery in this business, Selim is now a sort of second Frankenstein, although a dozen times worse than Mrs. Shelley's character."

They visited all the hotels on the list they had made, and found no trace of the man, save that he had been seen to enter and leave all but two of them; and then they returned home again in time for dinner at six.

"Are you going to remain in the house this evening, Nick?" asked Conner, as they were leaving the table.

"No; I am too restless for that."

"Don't you think he will come here to-night?"

"Yes; but I don't want to wait for him. I want to go out and find him."

"We don't seem to have much luck in that effort."

"The luck will come presently. I feel it in my bones that the whole thing will be over and done with before the dawn of another day."

"I'll tell you what *I* think."

"What?"

"I think that Selim will lay low until about the middle of the night, and that then he will come here and try to enter the house by stealth. If he cannot do that, he will ring the bell and try to force his way past Joseph when he goes to open the door. Depend upon it, old man, the quickest way to run afoul of that fellow is to wait here at home."

"Maybe so; but I am going out, just the same. I have a feeling that I should do so. I have the sensation that somebody is in danger, and that I ought to be on hand to prevent a crime from being committed."

"I have known you a long time, Nick, and I never knew you to be affected in just this manner before."

"And I never was; but there is something uncanny about this whole business that has roused all the antagonistic qualities that I have in me. I don't like conditions that I do not understand, and I am free to confess that I do not understand this one. I don't believe in this 'change' business, and yet I am forced to accept the facts of it against my will. I cannot admit that there is any truth in what has been told to me about those people who perform this miraclelike transformation, and yet I am forced to admit that it may be true. If it is true, the quicker we can crush out any exercise of their strange powers in this country, the better."

"I quite agree with you."

"If it is true, Selim is probably the only one of his kind who is left alive in this country. He is the only one who can create another devil like himself, now that Kalat is dead. We don't want that sort of thing in the United States, Conner, and we must chase it out. Let it stay where it belongs, in Syria and around Damascus, or take the consequences; and if it is true that only violence can take the lives of those people, why, then, let's give them all the violence they need."

"Now you're talking."

"I'm talking rather wild, I think; but I confess that this business bothers me. I have never taken any stock in supernatural manifestations, and here I have been tacitly admitting the truth of some of them for a month past. Come on; are you ready?"

"Where are you going first?"

"I'm going over to the Mammoth."

"Probably while you are gone, Selim will come here again."

"Well, if he does he will keep on coming. I don't believe he could any more keep away from me now than a duck can keep away from water that is in plain sight. You can remain here if you like."

"No; I will go with you."

"I'll tell you what we will do; we will go over to the Mammoth and remain there for an hour or two, and if Selim doesn't show up in that time we will return here again. And if he doesn't show up here before morning——"

"Well, what then?"

"Then I'll turn the entire police force loose in the morning to search for him. We will round him up at all hazards, from his description, and I'll charge him with the crimes he committed over in Jersey."

CHAPTER XII.

SELIM'S TIGERLIKE FEROCITY.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the interior of the great Hotel Mammoth, it will be well to give a few words of description to the billiard-room of the house.

It is a very large room, extending, for its greater length, east and west at the rear of the building, and the billiard-tables are arranged around it so that they form a hollow square in its center.

In this square, in the very center of it, is a large, round table, devoted to writing-materials, and so constructed that a dozen men may be seated at it at one time.

Outside of this, fifteen or twenty feet away from it, is a circle of small tables, nine in number, at which patrons

of the hotel may sit and be served with drinks or with edibles, if so desired, and while thus engaged may watch the progress of the games at the same time; and, by a mere turn of the head or a swing of the chair, may look upon any table in the room with equal facility.

Nick Carter, accompanied by Conroy Conner, entered this room between half-past eight and nine o'clock that evening.

It was brilliantly alight and all the games were going busily, while at the small tables in the center the usual throng was gathered, watching the sport, or sipping their beverages and talking.

The two detectives paused for a moment near the door, then passed on into the room and to the center of it, approaching the only one of the small tables which happened to be unoccupied.

As they did so, Conner chanced to glance toward the huge writing-table, and instantly he stopped still in his tracks and clutched Nick by the arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "There he is—at last!"

It was true!

The man for whom they had been searching was just rising from the table, where he seemed to have been engaged in writing a letter, and he was now gazing at the address he had put on the envelope with that strange smile on his face which Joseph had so perfectly described.

Nick Carter had to confess to himself that he was amazed.

Here was undoubtedly the very man whom he had seen in the front room in the house of Kalat, when he was lying there in the cataleptic state, apparently dead.

There could be no mistake about it. This was the same man, although he was now dressed in elegance and was a man whose personal attractions would have singled him out anywhere from all others.

Indeed, as he stood there looking down upon his letter, scores of pairs of eyes were turned toward him, although he seemed to be, for the moment, entirely unconscious of the fact.

"What shall you do now, Nick?" asked Conner nervously.

"Watch him for a few moments," replied Nick quietly. "We will see what he does. But we will not lose sight of him again."

Just then a gentleman, in passing Selim, happened to brush against him, and the Syrian turned with a savage snarl half upon him, and for an instant it looked as if he would strike the man who was engaged in apologizing.

"Gee, but he has got a temper," muttered Conner. "Did you ever see such an exhibition of rage over a trivial thing? Wasn't it exactly like a wild animal."

"If the doctor is correct, there is more of the wild animal than of man in him just now," replied the detective.

Suddenly Nick started forward with a low word to Conner to wait where he was.

He had seen the address upon the envelope that Selim was holding in his hand and gazing upon with such rapt attention, and even at that distance he had been able to read it. It was addressed to himself, and it occurred to him that it would not be a bad idea to step directly forward and claim it.

Conner saw what the detective was about to do, and he braced himself for something about to happen, for he had no doubt that such would occur very soon now.

Nick walked forward leisurely, so as not to attract undue attention, and stopped directly in front of Selim.

"I think that letter is for me," he said quietly. "Shall I relieve you of it?"

Selim raised his eyes without otherwise moving a muscle of his whole body; but, oh, how those eyes did blaze with incarnate and bestial fury. They fairly shed fire, so baleful was the gleaming of them; and at once, as if all eyes in the room had seen the encounter and had sensed what was going on, the talk became hushed, every one paused in what he was doing, and a hush that could be felt fell over the room.

Selim's conduct was exactly that of an angry animal of the cat tribe. If he had possessed a tail, he would have lashed it against his sides while remaining otherwise motionless; as it was, he only stared with those great, round eyes, out of which the fires of hell seemed to be belching flames.

But Nick returned the glare coolly, and, reaching out his hand, repeated what he had said before:

"I think that letter is for me. I will relieve you of it."

He could see that Selim's upper lip was gradually tightening over his teeth. He could realize that the demon, in the excess of his fury, was oblivious of all else save that the man he hated stood before him, looking at him. He knew that for the moment Selim had ceased to be a man at all, and was only a savage monster of the jungle, ready for the attack, prepared for the fatal spring.

No sound escaped him, but with the tightening and raising of the upper lip appeared that awful smile again; and it seemed as if the spectators around the room were holding their breathing, even. Not a click of the billiard-balls could be heard; not a voice disturbed the utter silence.

Then, like a coiled spring suddenly released, Selim acted.

His hands shot out straight before him with the lightninglike quickness of the animal he had wished to be like; and so quickly was it done that they shot past Nick Carter's guard and had seized him by the throat before he had time to defend himself.

There was an instant or two, then, when Nick Carter realized how those men over in Jersey had been killed, for the terrible strength of that grip almost choked him before he could tear it away from his throat.

But he did succeed in tearing it loose after a second or two, but only to find himself attacked again before he could deliver the blow he had intended to deal Selim.

The fellow seemed to be made of wire springs, and every one of them tested to great endurance.

The instant that Nick tore the grip away from his throat, Selim snatched his hands free again, and plunged with them extended, clawlike, for his throat a second time.

But now they missed his throat and seized upon his waistcoat, and in an instant it was torn from Nick's body as if it were so much paper.

Again Nick tore himself free from the grasp, and this time he leaped a little to the rear to avoid a third attack of the same nature, and to obtain an opportunity to deliver a blow with his fist.

But as if Selim divined what Nick wished to do, he leaped away in the opposite direction, and, with a spring like a cat, he sprang upon the round writing-table, over it, seized a billiard-cue from the hands of a player, darted back again upon the table, and down to the floor in front of Nick, all so quickly that it was astounding.

And then the cue whirled through the air, aimed at the detective's head, and must have crushed him and killed him had it hit him.

Nick had only one method by which he could avoid it, and he used that one.

He simply dropped to the floor and let the swinging cue pass over his head, which it did, missing him by only a few inches.

As it swung around, Selim released his hold upon it and let it crash against the wall at the opposite side of the room, while he threw himself forward upon the detective, who was now down and slowly trying to rise.

Selim came upon him like a heavy weight, bearing him to the floor again, and those terrible hands again sought his throat.

But as he stumbled, Nick reached up again. He seized the wrists of the hands that were trying to choke him; then he forced them both into the grasp of one of his own hands; then with the released hand he reached upward once again and seized Selim by the hair, for Selim was now trying to bite with his teeth and to tear with them.

Holding him thus, the detective struggled to his feet, with Selim clinging to his back, and then, shutting his jaws tightly together, and exerting himself for one mighty effort, he suddenly threw his body forward, gave a quick and a terrible jerk with his hands, and at the same instant released his hold upon his adversary.

The result of it may be anticipated.

Selim was hurled ten feet into the air, and he flew round and round like a cart-wheel; he was propelled in this way fully twenty feet, high over the small, round tables, and in an instant more he crashed against one of the billiard-tables, striking it head first directly on the rail; and from there he fell to the floor in a huddled heap from which he made no effort to move.

"Gentlemen," said the detective, as calmly as he could speak under the circumstances, "the man there, whom I have just thrown, is the murderer of the four men who were killed over in Jersey last night—and those are not his only crimes."

"Well, he won't commit any more," said a man who had been bending over him, and who now arose. "The man is dead. His neck is broken."

* * * * * * *

We do not attempt to explain "The Change." History describes such a class of people, who live among the mountains between Syria and Beirut. "The Change" has been described over and over again by men who have tried to investigate it. We only know that this incident, as described, was one of Nick Carter's experiences.

THE END.

The next number (589) will be: "A Plot Within a Palace; or, Nick Carter's Royal Client."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Two convicts who recently escaped from Princetown, Dartmoor, England, were caught, like most similar fugitives, while having a meal. The popular idea—a natural one, much encouraged by writers of fiction—that such prison breakers are captured while hiding in romantic spots deep in the wild moors is seldom realized. If the men could exist in such localities the chances are they would get away permanently; as it is, famine forces them to seek human dwellings, where they are almost invariably secured while satisfying their hunger. It was so with the pair referred to—they were seated at a meat tea, set before them by involuntary hosts, a Dartmoor farmer and his wife, who, while granting their petition for food, sent word to the warders who were searching for them.

Another prisoner who escaped from the same convict station was located through much the same cause. He had successfully crossed Dartmoor to the railway, where he succeeded in secreting himself in a passing railway car. Exhausted by privation he fell asleep, and did not awaken until the car was uncovered at Penzance. There he might have got off with a reprimand as a mere tramp who had risked his life for a free ride, but the vehemence with which he declared his famished condition aroused suspicion, and he was detained pending inquiry.

The fate of a convict who is said to have been the only man who ever escaped from Portland was somewhat similar. After getting clear of the prison by means of a pail-handle ingeniously used, he hid in the neighboring quarries where he lived for nearly a week upon bread he had taken with him. At the end of that time, partly by swimming and partly by creeping along Chesil Beach, he reached the outskirts of Dorchester, where he entered a clergyman's house, helped himself liberally to food, and substituted a clerical suit for his own arrow-marked garments—all but one little item. Then he walked out among his fellow-men, but he had not money to buy food, and was compelled to live on blackberries. Some days later an intelligent constable, surprised to observe a seeming clergyman grazing upon bramble bushes, approached to investigate. The fugitive was on the point of satisfying the policeman's curiosity when the latter chanced to notice that the "clergyman" was wearing prison socks. After that the game was up.

But perhaps the most curious instance of escaped convicts being brought back to durance vile owing to their appetites occurred at Parkhurst, where two men evaded the warders one night and, being at liberty, chanced upon a house where a supper party had just risen from table. They found the room deserted and sat down to what was left of the feast, with the result that when they got up to go away they were caught without difficulty, simply because they had eaten so much that they were incapable of doing anything to save themselves.

Occasionally, of course, men get away, and are taken back through other causes than those connected with need of food. Such cases are few and far between, but one occurred some years ago, when a convict escaped from Borstal, near Rochester, by getting through a skylight. From there he dropped to the ground and broke his ankle, so that he could hardly move. At daylight he was observed crawling toward a wood, and rearrested.

A different fate overtook one of three who escaped from Princetown. One was shot dead, one only got a very short distance from the prison, while the third successfully evaded his pursuers and reached Devonport, having meantime procured a change of clothes. There, while walking along the street, a dog accompanying a policeman smelt at his legs, and the man was so "jumpy" that he bolted on the spot. The constable, his suspicions aroused, chased and caught him, with the result that he was taken back whence he had come.

But, on the whole, bolts and bars are found less effectual than the fear of famine, which is probably the reason why the State prison of Represa, California, has neither the one nor the other. If a convict tries to leave there he may be shot; if he gets off it is a practical certainty that he must starve to death.

A strange duel happened in Argentine a few years ago. Two ranchers were enamored of the same dark-eyed señorita. Now, when your South American is hit by the blind archer, he is hit hard. He is not satisfied to visit his charmer one evening in the week and give up the rest of the time to his rivals. If he catches another admirer hanging about the house of his beloved one, there is apt to be trouble and work for both the priest and undertaker.

The two sighing swains in question had agreed to settle by a duel with the lariat, which should wed the damsel. A hundred piratical-looking cow-punchers assembled to witness the fray. The rivals appeared mounted on mettlesome mustangs, each with a long, powerful lariat of tough bull-hide.

They were both experts with the rope, and their horsemanship was a marvel. They approached to within forty or fifty yards of each other, then began to maneuver for a deciding cast. After several feints the lariat of the younger of the rivals went whizzing through the air so swiftly that the

eye could scarcely follow it. The other sunk his spurs into his mustang.

The animal shot forward just in time to save his master from the deadly noose, and as he did so the second lariat rose into the air and settled around the shoulders of the man who missed, pinned his arms to his sides as in a vise. He was jerked headlong out of his saddle.

His successful rival drew him along, hand over hand, half-lifted him from the ground by the tenacious thong, and put a bullet squarely between his eyes. He then turned and rode directly to the hacienda where lived the cause of this barbaric scene. She mounted behind him, and he came galloping back, swinging his sombrero.

A French resident at the town of Hatien, a port on the Gulf of Siam, conceived the idea that it would be perfectly practicable to make the immense turtles, which are not uncommon in those parts, and which swim with no little rapidity, do service in drawing the small fishing-boats.

He purchased two large turtles, and fitted them out with harness and reins. Then he obtained a light open boat, about fifteen feet long, and attached his turtles to it by means of traces.

Holding his reins fast, he set out on a little trial voyage with the turtle team. The creatures paddled along very prettily, at a rate somewhat exceeding the ordinary walking of a man.

As they directed their course toward the open sea, and as the weather was calm and beautiful, and the voyage exceedingly pleasant, it did not occur to the Frenchman to make any very thorough test of his ability to guide the animals.

Much delighted, indeed, with the success of his experiment, he kept on and on, until he presently noted that he was already a considerable distance out at sea, and that the sun was setting.

The interested navigator then attempted to turn his team about, but the turtles resisted any such movement. They had evidently made up their minds to go to sea, and they would not be dissuaded from their purpose.

The driver pulled his reins until he upset his turtles in the water; but as often as they regained the use of their flippers, they set out again for the middle of the sea.

Night settled down rapidly. Luckily the inventor of the new means of marine traction had brought with him a pair of oars, and as a last resort he took a knife, cut his tugs, and let his sea steeds, harness, reins and all go their way.

Then he rowed back laboriously to his village, lamenting his expenditure on the turtles, and resolving not to try any further experiments in navigation.

A traveler tells of an exciting adventure which fell to his lot while he was exploring a mountain peak on the Chinese coast in company with two sailors named respectively Rose and Burke.

Leaving the men below he climbed the side of a precipice, only to find that he could not get down again. It is much easier to ascend than to descend a precipice. There he hung on the rocky edge of a ravine.

Jutting out from the other side of this abyss, and only eight or ten feet below, was a bed of rocks. If he could spring to that he might land in safety. As he was thinking whether he dared make the venture his slight foothold gave way, and his whole weight was left suspended by a bunch of grass he was grasping. The question was decided. He must either fall into the fissure or dare the leap.

The bed of rocks was full of holes and sharp-pointed stones. The rank growth might contain a thousand snakes. Only a few moments before they had killed one most villainous reptile, sunning himself in a similar locality. He shuddered at the idea of casting himself bodily over that fissure into such an uninviting berth. Then, too, he might fall short and drop into the ravine. He had no foothold from which to spring. He would have to push himself from the mountain by means of elbow, knees, chest, and feet.

It was the tightest place he had ever been in. And he had to act at once, or the grass would lose its hold. Rose and Burke were in a terrible state of excitement.

"Hold on!" called Rose.

"Stand by to jump!" shouted Burke.

The fissure was about three feet wide.

The pointed rocks beyond looked awful, and in the grass the traveler fancied he saw the motion which indicated the presence of serpents. At last, although the very thought made the perspiration start, he resolved to try the jump.

He had just braced himself when, within a foot of the hand which held the bunch of grass, he saw the sullen glance of two eyes and the flattened head of a snake. He gazed and shuddered, but the sight nerved him to leap.

The very edge of the fissure received him, bruised and panting, but with whole bones and in safety.

"MAN THE LIFE-BOAT."

One wintry night, or, rather, early one morning, when the majority of the inhabitants of Great Yarmouth were fast asleep, the wind rose with unexpected suddenness.

Although snow had fallen all day long, the air had been perfectly still, and the billows broke lazily on the expansive sands.

Two coast-guardsmen braved the storm in the open air.

"There's a fleet of smacks out there!" bellowed John Harding, pointing to the sands.

He might as well have spoken to a rock, for the wind completely drowned his voice; but William Nightingale understood the gesture, and strained his eyes through the horrible jumble of black and white.

Suddenly there arose above the howling of the storm a tremendous sound of crashing timbers, intermingled with the hoarse roar of human voices.

Then the wind and waves had it all their own way again.

Harding and Nightingale ran hither and thither, but they could see no signs of a wreck.

It was a mystery to them both, for so loud had been the crash that only a large vessel could have caused it.

While they were pondering on the situation, a bright light cleaved the darkness far out at sea, and the loud booming of a gun followed.

Firing their pistols, the two coast-guardsmen ran, at the top of their speed, to the life-boat house, and soon the sonorous alarm-bell gave warning of shipwreck and disaster.

In less than ten minutes hundreds of people were out of their houses and racing for the beach.

In the meantime, a dozen or more sturdy fellows were putting on suits of oilskins, sou'westers, and boots that reached to their thighs.

As many more had hauled out the life-boat and attached to it some powerful horses.

An attempt to launch and man the life-boat was made.

There, in the very teeth of the wind, and buffeted by the savage billows, clung the stout-hearted and true men, flung back again and again, their benumbed hands crushed and torn, but never relaxing their hold.

At last a few succeeded in clamboring into the boat, and while some seized upon the oars, the others contrived to set a sail.

The life-boat writhed and shuddered like a living thing in pain, but presently a huge billow lifted it from the sands and swept it clear of the beach.

There were still men clinging to the gunwales, but they were hauled in by their comrades; and Captain Brown, scrambling over the seats, relieved the man who had taken his stand at the tiller.

Every man in the life-boat was soaked to the skin and chilled to the bone, in spite of his overalls.

Captain Brown was a man of great experience.

He had been out in the same life-boat scores of times, but he had never seen anything like this.

With his face set with the grim determination "to do or die," he clung to the tiller and kept the life-boat before the wind.

Where was the vessel—was she still running before the wind, or had she foundered?

Just then young Hooper, who had eyes as keen as a hawk's, sang out that he saw something to starboard.

And, sure enough, as the sea fell again, there, upon those deadly sands, rose a mast, with something that, at first, looked like a bundle of canvas, twisted by the storm, at the topmast part of the rigging.

Captain Brown seized his glass, and, wiping the lens carefully, took a quick observation.

"We have her!" he cried excitedly. "Her hull is under the water, but most of her crew—I hope all—are clinging up there. Out oars, and pull for their lives and your own!"

No further incentive was needed.

Every man went to his work like a giant refreshed.

Cold and pain were forgotten in a moment, and the life-boat flew to its work of rescue.

The shipwrecked mariners raised a shout of frantic joy when they saw the life-boat.

"How many are there of you?" Captain Brown shouted, when he got within hail.

The reply first came in Dutch, and then in English.

"Twelve. For Heaven's sake, make haste and help us. Our captain was the last to leave the deck, and he is almost frozen to death."

It was hazardous work getting near to the unhappy creatures hovering between life and death; but at last a line was thrown with unerring aim.

It was caught by the strongest of the shipwrecked crew and made fast.

"The boys first!" some brave fellows cried out.

Two half-frozen and thoroughly soaked lads began to descend.

The life-boat men watched them with bated breath and fast-beating hearts, for the rope swayed violently from side to side.

The waves leaped up, as if to snatch the boys from the work of rescue.

"Hold on, lads!" Captain Brown cried out encouragingly. "Don't let your hands give way."

He stood ready with a life-buoy, lest the lads' strength gave way; but to the great joy of all they swung clear of the greedy waves and dropped into the boat.

A loud cheer announced their safety, which was followed by the warning voice of Captain Brown.

"Back water!" he shouted, "or we shall get entangled with some part of the wreck. Steady, boys, steady! Don't hurry, or we may have some valuable lives to answer for."

One by one the shipwrecked crew were taken aboard, where they sank, overcome and almost helpless, at the bottom of the boat.

"Cut the rope!" yelled Captain Brown; "the mast is falling!"

A blow from an ax severed the strands, and the life-boat flew back, as if it knew the peril its living freight was in.

Almost at the same instant Captain Brown's words were verified.

The mast, with its tangled rigging and wildly flying pieces of sail, lurched to and fro, and then toppled over, and, drifting away, left the sea clear.

"We shall run home quicker than we came."

He put all his strength on the tiller, and turned the bows of the life-boat toward the beach.

Beds were already prepared at the station, and the people ran to and fro with bottles of spirits in their hands, while others had dragged blankets from their beds to envelope the sufferers in.

"Here they come!" cried an old sailor. "Heaven bless 'em, here they come. Brown is waving his hand, and I know that he and his mates have done their work well."

As the life-boat ran in between the jetty and the pier, Captain Brown dropped his hand and stared, as if he thought he must be mad or dreaming.

The sound that John Harding and William Nightingale had heard was not, without its terrible meaning.

Some huge vesssel had cut the pier clean in two and had passed on its way, but whither, or to what fate, was never heard to this very hour.

But it was neither the time nor the season for conjecture.

Captain Brown was too sound a man to lose his head, even with such a spectacle before him; and he directed all his skill and energy to the safe landing of the poor fellows lying huddled, and almost unconscious, in the craft he had handled so well and bravely.

As the life-boat was beached and heeled over, hundreds of willing hands were ready to convey the sufferers tenderly to the Sailors' Home, where they were promptly put to bed, and received the attention of the most expert medical men in the town.

That day was a red-letter one; hands grasped hands, and they spoke in hushed voices of the terrors they had undergone, and thanked the Giver of All for sending them back in safety.

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